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A
PRACTICAL EXPOSITION

OF THE

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES,

IN THE FORM OF

LECTURES,

INTENDED TO ASSIST THE PRACTICE OF DOMESTIC
INSTRUCTION AND DEVOTION.

By JOHN BIRD SUMNER, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF CHESTER.

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EXPOSITORY LECTURES.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

LECTURE I.

ASCENSION OF JESUS, A.D. 33.

Acts i. 1—11.

THE book on which we are now entering, entitled the Acts of the Apostles, may be considered as the second part or volume of the gospel according to St. Luke. In his former narrative he had related the events of the life and ministry of Jesus. And now he continues his account, and describes the establishment and progress of the religion of Christ : dedicating his treatise to the same disciple, “the most excellent Theophilus,” to whom he had before addressed his gospel.

It was needful that such an account should be preserved ; and we may be assured that St. Luke wrote under the influence and direction of the Holy Ghost. At the same time he was peculiarly qualified for the purpose, having been the companion of St. Paul during a great part of his journeys and ministrations.¹

¹ See Acts xvi. 10.

1. *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,*

2. *Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen :*

3. *To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God :*

4. *And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.*

5. *For John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

6. *When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ?*

7. *And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

8. *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

The apostles had *come together*, by command, doubtless, of the Lord, that they who had been witnesses of his humiliation might also be witnesses of his glory. And on this, the last opportunity of intercourse, they show the strong feelings of their minds as Jews, zealous for the honour of their nation. They inquire, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel ?* This had been their expectation from the first ; and after his de-

cease, one ground of their lamentation was, "We trusted it had been he that should have redeemed Israel."² We looked through him for restoration to national liberty and power. And now those hopes are gone.

The answer of our Lord, though not plain or decisive, would lead to the belief that the time will come when a kingdom shall belong once more to Israel. He does not say: Israel "knew not the time of his visitation," and Israel is cast off for ever: but he says: *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

The present concern, was duty: the present business, that which was to be immediately fulfilled. The kingdom of Christ was to be established in the world, and these were to establish it. *Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

Thus should be accomplished what had been spoken from the first. The church should be raised upon its founder's grave. He had declared, (John xii. 24,) "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." All might have supposed, as the chief priests and Pharisees supposed, and as the apostles themselves had feared, that when he died upon the cross, his influence would also die: that nothing more would be heard re-

² Luke xxiv. 21.

specting him, when he who “made himself the Son of God” had suffered the death of man.

But now, on the other hand, the Lord confidently declares, *Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* And this book relates how they became so; were endued with a power which they had not naturally, being “baptized with the Holy Ghost;” and fulfilled their Master’s prophecy, “Now is the prince of this world cast out.”³ “For the weakness of God, is stronger than men.”

Nothing now remained to detain the Saviour from that “glory which he had with the Father before the world was.”

9. *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*

10. *And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;*

11. *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

This revelation was mercifully sent at the moment when it was needed by the apostles, both to instruct and to console them. *Why stand ye gazing up to heaven? This same Jesus, who is now taken up from you, will still make good his words.* “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on

³ John xii. 31.

the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”⁴ *In like manner* as he has now ascended, in the form of man, but in the power of God; so in the exercise of the same divine omnipotence he shall hereafter descend from heaven once more, “when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.”⁵ “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him.”⁶

Here, too, was their consolation. Now they were *gazing up to heaven*, as if all had been lost when he was taken from them. But he was only gone, as he had said, “to prepare a place for them:” he would come again, and receive them unto himself;⁷ and *in like manner* as they had seen him ascend, in the form which he bore on earth, in that form would he remain at the right hand of God to make intercession for his people:⁸ and *in like manner* should he come, in the fulness of time, to “judge the world in righteousness.”

With this assurance they might comfort one another. And if they sorrowed that they were left alone in an evil world, they would not “sorrow as those without hope,” but look forward to a glorious day when they should be received by their heavenly Shepherd into his heavenly fold. For the same heaven which opened to receive their Lord, shall also open to receive “all them that love his appearing.”⁹

⁴ Matt. xxvi. 64.

⁶ Rev. i. 7.

⁸ Heb. vii. 25.

⁵ 2 Thess. i. 10.

⁷ John xiv. 3.

⁹ 2 Tim. iv. 8.

LECTURE II.

ASSEMBLY OF THE APOSTLES. MATTHIAS IS
CHOSEN IN THE ROOM OF JUDAS.—A.D. 33.

Acts i. 12—26.

12. *Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath-day's journey.*¹

13. *And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomeu, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.*

14. *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*

The upper rooms in the East are often large, and extend along the whole length of the house. The place to which our Lord directed his apostles, that they might eat the Passover before the crucifixion, was a “large upper room.” According to ancient tradition, this was the very room which the apostles

¹ That is, about the distance which it might be necessary to travel to the synagogue for the purpose of public worship on the sabbath. Bethany, where Mount Olivet was situated, was a mile distant from Jerusalem.

were now permitted to occupy, and where they waited for “the promise of the Father.”

That promise did not hinder or supersede their prayer. *They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.* It had been so with Daniel of old. A promise had been made, that the captivity of Judah should not be perpetual: nay, the period of it had been fore-shown. And this promise, instead of rendering prayer superfluous, encouraged the prophet to pray. When he “understood by books (Dan. ix. 2) the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem, he set his face unto the Lord, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.” And so the apostles here. *They continue in supplication.* The intercourse which they had long enjoyed with their blessed Master was not broken off, though its nature was changed.

Mary the mother of Jesus, we might expect to find with them. John had taken her under his charge, and her heart was sure to be with those whom Jesus had “loved to the end.” But we find *his brethren* also. It had not been always thus. A year before we had read, (John vii. 5,) “Neither did his brethren believe in him.” In the interval, light had beamed upon them; and they who once doubted his divine authority and viewed him with jealousy, are now abiding with the apostles, and

with one accord joining with them in prayer. God had given them to his beloved Son.

15. *And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty)²*

16. *Men and brethren, This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them which took Jesus.*

17. *For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.*

18. *Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.³*

19. *And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem, insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama; that is to say, The field of blood.⁴*

20. *For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick⁵ let another take.*

21. *Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,*

22. *Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.*

23. *And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.*

² Without reference to those five hundred in Galilee who are mentioned as brethren by Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 6.

³ Matt. xxvii. 5.

⁴ Matt. xxvii. 8. St. Luke introduces this as his own remark, and speaks of *their* proper tongue, not that in which he was writing.

⁵ Or office, charge. Ps. xix. 25; cix. 8.

24. *And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen,*

25. *That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.*

26. *And they gave forth their lots ; and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

How much of awful interest is involved in that expression concerning Judas, *that he might go to his own place*. There is a place for the righteous : we are assured so : “ prepared from the foundation of the world.” And there is a place for the wicked. These are separate one from the other. There is “ a great gulf between ” them. And of each we may say, that it is their own place.

Hell was Judas’s *own place*. He had sold himself to Satan, whilst apparently in the service of Christ. He had followed the example and lived under the influence of “ the angels that sinned.” Whilst here on earth, the society of the good was not his place ; this he had shown, pursuing a sinful habit, and proving that he was still of the earth, earthly ; still of the world, worldly. And at last he had done an act of wickedness which manifested the hardness of a heart fast held “ in the bond of iniquity.”

Therefore, a place where dwell “ the wicked and the devilish,” “ shut out from the presence of the Lord,” was *his own place*. It was the place belonging to his nature, and the place assigned of God to natures like his.

In a like sense we may say of the righteous, that they too go to their own place when called out of this present world. Their nature, originally no purer than that of Judas, has been renewed by the Spirit of God. Through that blood which was “shed for the remission of sin,” their sins have been washed away. They have walked as “children of light,” and have been made “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.” That inheritance is the place prepared for such ; and therefore, when they die, they go to *their own place*. In a double sense it is their own : it is their own, because it is the place for which their regenerated natures have been made fit, and it is their own, because it is the place purchased for them and due to them through the merits of their Lord and Saviour.⁷

Therefore there is a place ready for every individual, when he departs this life, which may be called *his own place*. At present, whilst the hour of trial lasts, there is no Judas who may not be pardoned, as Simon was pardoned, and become an approved disciple. But that time hastens to an end ; and then the sentence takes effect, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still.”⁸ Let the unjust and the filthy, the righteous and the holy, dwell in *their own place* for ever.

⁷ Τον ὀφειλομενον ἀντοῖς τοπον, is a phrase used both by Clement and Polycarp.

⁸ Rev. xxii. 11.

LECTURE III.

THE HOLY GHOST DESCENDS UPON THE APOSTLES.—PETER ADDRESSES THE JEWISH ASSEMBLY.—A. D. 33.

Acts ii. 1—21.

1. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*

2. *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.*

3. *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*

4. *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

“Faithful is he that hath promised.” “Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”⁹ So the apostles believed; and patiently waited for the promise, which they had been told they should receive of the Father.¹

A day was chosen for this, which was a high day among the Jews—the day of Pentecost—the fiftieth from the Passover—one of the three solemn occasions, when, according to the law, all the men of Israel were commanded to “appear before the Lord.”²

⁹ Heb. x. 37.

¹ Acts i. 4.

² Ex. xxxiv. 23.

This festival had assembled them together. And the season was chosen for bestowing on them a power which was necessary that the mercy of God might take effect, and the gospel be preached unto all nations. They were “baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire,” as John Baptist had foreseen and foretold. “*There appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they began to speak with other tongues, (other than their native tongue,) as the Spirit gave them utterance.*” Formerly, the wickedness of man had caused that separation between the various tribes of the human race, which arises from their different languages.³ That punishment was now in part remitted; and a door opened for the communication of God’s mercy: that “his way might be known upon earth, his saving health unto all nations.”

The messengers of this same mercy, the missionaries who now convey the gospel to the heathen, are forced to sit down for a while, in patient silence, and gradually acquire the power of making themselves understood by the people of a strange land. Many years pass before they can effect this perfectly. It pleased God to remove this barrier out of the way of the apostles. Thus no interval occurred between the facts and the declaration of the facts. The memory of what had been done was full and clear.

God, therefore, who, in former times, had given extraordinary powers to men whom he had chosen

³ Gen. xi. 6—9.

as instruments of his will, did thus interfere again, and enable the apostles, who were to “go forth into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” to *“speak with other tongues, to address every man in his own language, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

5. *And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.*⁴

6. *Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.*

7. *And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak, Galileans?*

8. *And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*

9. *Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,*

10. *Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,*

11. *Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.*

12. *And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?*

13. *Others mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.*⁵

14. *But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye*

⁴ Out of all the different countries where Jews resided, who were now come to Jerusalem for the purpose of the festival.

⁵ New wine, prepared for the uses of the festival.

that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words :

15. *For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.*

16. *But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel ;⁶*

17. *And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams :*

18. *And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit ; and they shall prophesy :*

19. *And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath ; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke :*

20. *The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come :*

21. *And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

Such had been the language of the prophet Joel, and such the divine promise, of which this was the first accomplishment. A time had been foretold, when a remarkable effusion of God's Spirit should take place : large beyond former experience, and general beyond man's expectation. *In the last days, saith God,*—in the last days of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nation—*I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh ;* upon the Jew first, as had been already fulfilled in the apostles, and afterwards upon the Gentile also ; *and they shall prophesy ;* they shall be employed to carry my word

⁶ Joel ii. 28—31.

into the uttermost ends of the earth. Other signs and wonders shall follow : “ signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars ; and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity ; the sea and the waves roaring ; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth ; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.” So the Lord himself describes, (Luke xxi. 25,) in terms like those of Joel, dangers and national calamities of which these figures are the emblem : dangers and calamities which should usher in *that great and notable day of the Lord*, when “ Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles,” and suffer the punishment of obstinate disobedience, “ because she had not known the time of her visitation.”

Where, however, in the Bible, are we left without hope ? Where is darkness to be found without light, or judgment without mercy ? Certainly not here. Here, too, is grace offered. *It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* “ For in Mount Sion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said.”⁷ So the original prophecy concludes. There was yet an opening of escape, an interval allowed for repentance and for pardon. “ Return unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon you ; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

The apostle points to this in the remainder of his discourse ; and thus practically displays the purpose of God, who “ willeth not that any should

⁷ Joel ii. 32.

perish, but rather that he should be converted and live."

Could a clearer proof of his merciful will be given than we find here? In the very place where Christ "by wicked hands was crucified and slain," redemption through his name is first proclaimed.

There seems, in truth, to be a perpetual contest between God and his creatures ;—God as earnest for their salvation as they are indifferent concerning it. He constantly inviting, they as constantly refusing.

How much will this long-suffering on God's part, and this repugnance on the part of men, add to the bitterness of their condemnation, if they be at last condemned! Because, though warned of danger, they refused to listen: though assured of acceptance, they refused to humble themselves: though acquainted with the means through which redemption is offered to every man, they refused to *call on the name of the Lord* that they might *be saved*. And yet, the greater the mercy, the greater the condemnation, if that mercy is despised.

May the God of all grace enlighten the eyes of our understanding, that we may know the riches of the glory of his inheritance, and experience the exceeding greatness of his power towards them that believe.⁸

⁸ See Ephes. i. 19.

LECTURE IV.

CONTINUATION OF PETER'S DISCOURSE TO THE
JEWISH ASSEMBLY.—A. D. 33.

ACTS II. 22—36.

22 *Ye men of Israel, hear these words ; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know :*

23. *Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain :*

24. *Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death : because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.*

25. *For David speaketh concerning him,¹ I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved :*

26. *Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad : moreover also, my flesh shall rest in hope :*

27. *Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,² neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

28. *Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.*

29. *Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day :*

30. *Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his*

¹ Ps. xvi. 8—11.

² In Hades, the place of departed spirits.

*loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne:*³

31. *He seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.*

We here find Peter fulfilling the prophecy of his Lord ; laying the first stone of that building which he was to raise, the Christian church.⁴ The foundation on which he places it, is the death and resurrection of Christ. His death, though brought about by the wicked passions of men, was settled in *the determinate counsel of God*, that he might be “the propitiation for our sins,” the “Lamb slain before the foundation of the world.” Thus he died as man ; but he rose as God. *Him God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.* It was not possible that he who “had life in himself,” who “quickeneth whom he will,” should be kept in the chains of death. He might submit to die in that nature which he had assumed ; he might “lay down his life of himself,” though no man could take it from him ; but *it was not possible that he should be holden of death*, as had been fore-shown from the beginning in a prophecy of David, which cannot be justly or fully applicable to any other. In part, it is applicable to all the people of God ; *for he is on their right hand, that they shall not be moved ; moreover also their flesh shall rest in hope*, that “though worms destroy this body, yet in their flesh shall they see God ;” they shall

³ Ps. cxxxii. 11.

⁴ Matt. xv. 18.

“ come forth,” shall “ rise again at the last day.” But not until they have *seen corruption*. “ It is appointed unto all men once to die ;” to suffer the original sentence, “ Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.” But this did not Jesus. *His soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption*. In him, and in him alone, are the words of David verified, which, *being a prophet, he before spake of the resurrection of Christ*.

Such was the prophecy, hitherto lying in a dark place, on which the light had now shone. And this might prepare their minds for the fact which was to follow.

32. *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*

33. *Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.*

34. *For David is not ascended into the heavens : but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,*

35. *Until I make thy foes thy footstool.*⁵

36. *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

Here Peter brings home to the minds of the assembly that great truth which he must prove, and they receive. *God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ*. Your nation has long expected a king ; one whom the Lord should send “ to rule his people Israel.” Your own David speaks of such an one ; one who should

⁵ Ps. cx. 1.

ascend into heaven, which he himself did not ; should sit on the right hand of God, till all his foes were subdued under his feet. Jesus, then, whom *God hath raised up*, is that Lord, that King. Your nation has always expected a Messiah : one anointed of God to deliver his people. He is that Messiah : *God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ.*

But why should they believe this ? There were strong reasons to prevent their believing it ; for it opposed the whole current of their thoughts and opinions. Should their king be crucified ? Still more, should they have crucified their king, and thus acknowledge themselves guilty of a most heinous sin ? This they would be most unwilling to admit ; and there must be strong proof and evidence on Peter's side to prevail over the natural resistance of their hearts.

There was, however, such evidence. There was the evidence of that miracle, which had just excited their surprise. *Are not all these which speak Galileans ? And how hear we every man in his own tongue wherein he was born ?* Here was an astonishing fact, which must in some way be accounted for. St. Peter accounts for it. *This Jesus hath God raised up : and he hath sent forth that, which ye both see and hear.* Such proof could not be set aside, as the Jews had attempted in the case of other miracles. No false reasoning could explain it away. *How hear we every man speak in our own language ?* It agrees with a prophecy. It fulfils a promise which we find in our Scripture. But

these prophecies cannot cause the wonder, though they enable us to understand it : the cause must be, some more than human power exerted on these men.

Through this medium the truth was conveyed to the understanding of the assembly, that *God had made that same Jesus whom they had crucified both Lord and Christ*. And not alone to that assembly is the truth addressed. God has been pleased to leave such indisputable evidence of his Gospel, that it might satisfy all future ages. Only fifty days after the Crucifixion, when all the events were recent, and might be known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem, these apostles appeared as public witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus ; and the proofs of it which they alleged were satisfactory to a numerous and mixed assembly of their countrymen. What had not been then proved, could not be proved now. But what was then proved to be certain, is as certain now : has lost none of its claim to be believed.

Thus we are carried back to the foundation of our faith, and find it strong and firm. And that faith is, that *God has made that same Jesus, whom the Jews crucified, both Lord and Christ*. The Christ who died to atone, the Lord who lives to rule. “Through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death ; to guide our feet into the way of peace.”⁶

⁶ Luke i. 78.

LECTURE V.

PETER EXHORTS THE ASSEMBLY TO REPENT,
AND BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Acts ii. 37—40.

37. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

So great was the effect of the words of Peter, which we lately read, upon the consciences of his hearers. In the phrase of Isaiah, they were “like the hammer which breaks the rock in pieces.” In the phrase of St. Paul, they were like a double-edged sword, “piercing even to the dividing asunder the soul and spirit.” Because the Spirit of God accompanied the apostle’s words, adding weight to the hammer, and softening the rock; carrying the sword home, and making the soul sensible. *They were pricked in their hearts*: evidently, because of that particular sin which the apostle had closely pressed upon them, that they had crucified and slain him, whom God had sent to be a Prince and a Saviour.

There were some indeed among the number present, who had not been actively concerned in the death of Jesus. But even these, the foreign Jews *from every country*, would be conscious that when-

ever they had heard of Jesus in their visits to Jerusalem, they had neglected or derided him. The whole company acknowledge themselves to be in the same condition, and anxiously inquire, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

As a patient, whose physician might unexpectedly assure him that he had swallowed poison, and his life was in imminent danger—as the astonished patient would inquire, *What shall I do? what hope or remedy remains?* you are a man, and a brother, and can feel for such a state: only prescribe, and I am ready to comply;—such is the anxiety and the eagerness here expressed. *Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

Such a question, however, might be asked of a physician, and he might have no hope to give. He might be forced to acknowledge that the case was one for which he could offer nothing.

It is not so with the apostle. He has a ready answer, and a certain promise.

38. *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

39. *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

40. *And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.¹*

Observe the confidence with which Peter answers.

¹ Be among those saved—σωθητε.

He speaks “as one having authority.” He describes the issue as sure and certain. *Repent, and be baptized : and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.* Ye shall receive both pardon for the past, and grace for the future. Your transgressions shall be forgiven, which at present exclude you from the favour of God : and your nature shall be renewed, which has hitherto been averse from his will. You shall be baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” The Father will receive you : the Son will atone for you : the Holy Ghost will sanctify you. Thus shall you become members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

Such should be the blessing upon their repentance and their faith ; and this blessing should be made over to them in baptism.

We must remark, however, the proper place which repentance and faith hold in this transaction. They are the links of communication between man and God : the medium through which pardon is obtained, and acceptance granted. But they were not the cause or ground of pardon and acceptance. God forgives the penitent : not because he repents, but because Christ has died upon the cross for the remission of sin. The words are not merely—*Repent, and you shall find mercy ; “ Return unto the Lord, and he shall abundantly pardon ;”* but the injunction goes further : *Repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.* Repentance and faith procure an interest in his propitiation. We may compare the case

with that of some rich benefactor, who should assign a sum of money to discharge the debts of all who should apply in a certain fixed and appointed manner. All who apply in that prescribed manner, receive the benefit. Still it is not the fixed and appointed condition, but the liberality of the benefactor which pays the debts. Their compliance with the terms, does no more than make his bounty available to the particular individuals who fulfil them. Just so, repentance and faith do not “ blot out the hand-writing of transgression ” which is against us ; but procure an interest in that all-sufficient sacrifice, without which is no remission.

The promise follows, *Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*. Not such gifts as the apostles had received, and many afterwards received ; the gift of tongues, or of healing, or of prophecy ;—these were not granted indiscriminately to all who should repent and be baptized. But there is a gift of the Holy Ghost which is needful to every one : such a gift as shall render him what all must be who are in Christ Jesus : “ a new creature.” What should make them so ? Not their danger. They might feel their danger, and still be unrenewed. Not their sorrow. They might lament and grieve over their condemnation, and yet be unrenewed. Nothing within themselves could produce a change of character : that must be wrought in them from an external source. And to that source they are directed. It should be opened to them from above. *Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* : that ye may no longer be “ foolish, disobedient, deceived,

serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.”² This original nature, with the habits and dispositions belonging to it, must be done away, “by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” For such was the divine purpose, to accomplish which a ransom had been paid for the remission of sin—that God might have a people purified unto himself, “redeemed from all iniquity, and zealous of good works,” and waiting for his heavenly kingdom.³

The blessing which promised this, was not, we are assured, to that assembly alone, nor to their children : but to *them that were afar off, even as many as the Lord our God should call.* And this reminds us of the practical improvement to be drawn from the passage we have been considering.

That state of heart which was required of the assembly at Jerusalem, must be the habitual state of every Christian. Towards God, a state of penitent acknowledgment, that he has not been what he ought to have been, and even what he might have been. A state of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of that sin which he feels, confesses, and laments. And a state of prayerful expectation that “the Holy Ghost may be shed on him” more and more abundantly, that he may in greater and increasing measure be “partaker of the divine nature,” and made fitter for “the inheritance of the saints in light.”

To bring man to this mind, and to give eternal

² Titus iii. 3—5.

³ See Titus ii. 14.

life to all who are thus minded, was the object for which Christ died : and as far as this object is fulfilled, he has not “died in vain.”

LECTURE VI.

THREE THOUSAND ARE BAPTIZED, AND A SOCIETY OF CHRISTIANS IS FORMED.

Acts ii. 41—47.

41. *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized : and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*

Thus mighty was the effect produced by the Spirit of God. We lately read the exhortation of Peter, calling upon his countrymen to *save themselves from that untoward generation*, which had crucified “the Lord of glory.” What was required of them, was great indeed. It was required, that they who had joined with the rest of their countrymen, in rejecting Christ, should now acknowledge that he was the promised Messiah : nay more ; that in him alone they could obtain “remission of sin.” Others might not have been partakers of this same guilt : but their general spirit had been, no doubt, that of men self-satisfied ; approving themselves as righteous ; “resting in their knowledge of God” and of his law, and be-

lieving that “they had need of nothing.”⁴ Now their views must be wholly changed. They must confess themselves sinners in the sight of God, who had no hope but in his mercy : they must accept the terms of pardon offered by him, and *be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sin.*

Such, and no less, was the *repentance*, the change required. And yet so strong was the emotion produced upon their hearts, that three thousand persons *received the word gladly, were baptized*, and became the first fruits of the death of Christ, the first members of that company which no man can number.

The Lord had made a very express promise, that although they had been few who followed him whilst on earth, and became his avowed disciples, it should not be always so. (John xvi. 8.) “When He, the Comforter, is come, he will reprove⁵ the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on me : of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye see me no more : of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”

We see, now, the explanation and the fulfilment of that promise. That so many, even *three thousand souls*, should so suddenly and so gladly receive the word, and be baptized as believers in Christ, can be ascribed to nothing but the Spirit of God, reproving Peter’s hearers, softening their hearts, and disposing them to be convinced of sin, of

⁴ Rom. xi. 17.

⁵ ἑλεγχει: convict.

righteousness, and of judgment. Especially as this was no mere verbal acknowledgment of truth, or change of speculative opinion. A change of life ensued which must proceed from an abiding cause.

42. *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread,⁶ and in prayers.*

43. *And fear came upon every soul : and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.*

44. *And all that believed were together, and had all things common ;*

45. *And sold their possessions, and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

For the present, circumstances rendered this necessary. Many of those who were now baptized, would be forced to relinquish their former mode of livelihood. And the apostles, together with all those who were employed under them in teaching and publishing the gospel, would, of course, stand in need of subsistence. Therefore they *had all things common*. He that had much supplied him that had little, “so that there was no lack.” It was an extraordinary case, and met by an extraordinary provision. We shall find, as we proceed in the history, that this state of things continued but a short time. It is not, generally, the will of God, in his providential government of the world, that men should *have all things common*.

But the spirit which led to this, when “none of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own,” is a spirit inherent in the Christian faith. That faith is, that we have in-

⁶ Eating the Lord's Supper : as v. 46.

curred the wrath of God ; that the wrath of God is eternal death : and that our ransom from eternal death is the blood of Christ. Therefore, thus “bought with a price,” and such a price, we are no longer “our own :”⁷—so these men would argue : like one who has been purchased, who has become the property of his master, together with all belonging to him, and must surrender himself to that master’s use. Whatever he has need of, whatever may serve the purpose of his will, must be yielded up. Therefore they *sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men*, because the present occasion required it. The preachers of the gospel, and the believers in the gospel, could not at that moment have been otherwise maintained.

The principle remains the same to all who are led by the same spirit and live in the same faith. The only question will be, in what way they are called upon, in their particular circumstances, to act upon the principle, that they are “not their own.”

46. *And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,*

47. *Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*⁸

⁷ 1 Cor. vi. 20. 2 Cor. v. 15.

⁸ *Τους σωζομενους*. Those saved, those that were saved, or, placed in a state of salvation. There is nothing in the original to imply the sense which seems to be conveyed in the words *should be*.

A fresh company came daily in, and swelled the number of believers. It was the Lord's doing: *the Lord added them to the church*: He opened their hearts that they should attend unto the things spoken.⁹ And those who thus believed and were baptized, *were saved* from the wrath to come.

The same language might describe a shipwreck. All who reach a certain rock are saved. First one, and then another, climb the rock, and are added to the number saved. The success of some encourages more to follow. And a hand stronger than their own is with them; gives them spirit to make the attempt, and gives them power to succeed. So it is here. Those are saved who embrace the offer of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. He is the rock of their salvation. And day after day, as the church,¹ that is, the company of believers, became more known, and gave proofs of sincerity and piety, that company grew and multiplied. The Lord stirred up fresh hearts daily to exercise faith in Christ Jesus, and to be baptized in his name as "Lord and Christ."

⁹ Ch. xvi. 14, compare John 44.

¹ The church, ἐκκλησία, or assembly, is here for the first time used to signify the company of believers: "the holy catholic church" of the Nicene creed: or, according to the Articles of the church of England, the "congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance."

LECTURE VII.

PETER HEALS A CRIPPLE, AND EXPLAINS TO THE
PEOPLE THE POWER WHICH HE HAD USED.—

A. D. 33.

Acts iii. 1—16.

1. *Now Peter and John went up together into the temple, at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.*

At the ninth hour, three o'clock of our time, these two apostles went to prayer in the temple. Three such times were appointed among the Jews, answering to nine, twelve, and three, with ourselves. Therefore David said, "Evening and morning and at noon-day will I pray and cry aloud." And Daniel, in conformity with this practice, when the temple was no longer open to him, still "kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed and gave thanks before God."¹ This intermediate refreshment serves to keep the heart with God, and counteracts the influence of the ordinary business of the world.

Few can seek this refreshment *in the temple* itself, as at Jerusalem; but every place may be a temple, if the soul is lifted up towards God.

¹ Daniel vi. 10.

2. *And a certain man, lame from his mother's womb, was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful,¹ to ask alms of them that entered into the temple ;*

3. *Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.*

4. *And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.*

5. *And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.*

6. *Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none ; but such as I have give I thee : In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*

7. *And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up ; and immediately his feet and anele-bones received strength.*

8. *And he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.*

This was a remarkable miracle, performed upon a well-known person, in a public place and manner. And the reason is plain, why God at that time bestowed such power upon the apostles.

When God commanded Moses (Exodus iv. 1) to go to his countrymen the Israelites, and acquaint them that the time of their deliverance was come, and that he was commissioned to effect it, “ Moses answered and said, But behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice ; for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee. And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand ? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the

² A gate of Corinthian brass, erected by Herod the Great.

ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent. That they may believe that the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee."

So in the present case. The apostles went forth as the messengers of God. But those who go forth as messengers in another's name, must prove that they are messengers, and really have the authority which they profess. The ambassador who is sent from one country to another, exhibits the seal and the commission which he holds. Without these he could make nothing valid. The miracles wrought by the apostles were to them like the seal of the ambassador. The ambassador could not be in possession of the seal, unless the sovereign had entrusted him with it. The apostles could not seal the truth of their words by works beyond human power, unless God were with them. You believe not us, they might say, whom you know to be men like yourselves. Believe the works, and acknowledge that God is with us of a truth.

The cure performed upon the lame man had this its proper effect. It drew attention; and prepared the minds of the people to hear the words of Peter, and receive his explanation.

9. *And the people saw him leaping, walking, and praising God:*

10. *And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.*

11. *And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's,³ greatly wondering.*

12. *And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?*

13. *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.*

14. *But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;*

15. *And killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.*

16. *And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*

When the Lord Jesus performed his cures, his words were, "I will: be thou clean." "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Not so his apostles. They came not in their own power or holiness. *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. His name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong.* It is an example for the ministers of Christ. If they have a just sense of their commission, they go forth in the same power, and for a like purpose.

³ See John x. 23. It was likely that there would be some place where the people might expect to meet with the apostles. And this spacious portico of the temple seems to have been the resort chosen by them. Chapter v. 12, we again find them "all with one accord in Solomon's porch."

We know the purpose of the apostles. Peter shows it here. *Ye denied the Holy One and the Just ; ye killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead ; whereof we are witnesses.* Thus he aims to convince them of their sin, and to turn their hearts towards him whom they had crucified. And such must be the object of all who come after them. They also must labour to convince men of the sin of their nature and their habits,—the real cause which crucified the Son of God ;—and to direct them to that same name for pardon of their sin and renewal of their nature. The wickedness of the Jews, was but the character of our original corruption. *They denied the Holy One and the Just, and preferred a murderer.* What is this, but the preference of our nature ? To choose not light, but darkness, not good but evil, not God but Satan ?

This it is easy to set forth. Still will the minister say, What are we, sinful like yourselves, that we should prove this to you ? So prove it, that you may repent and be converted ? Yet there is a way : a way, that instead of lying in the dust, and cleaving to this earth, ye may rise up, and walk before God in righteousness and holiness ; glorifying him in the sight of all by your obedience, and setting your affections on his heavenly kingdom. *This name, the name of Christ, through faith in this name, may give you perfect soundness.* For he is still *the Prince of Life* : “ hath life in himself, and quickeneth whom he will.” And those whom he will quicken, are those who come to him and believe in his name.

LECTURE VIII.

PETER CONTINUES HIS DISCOURSE TO THE
PEOPLE.—A.D. 33.

ACTS iii. 17—26.

17. *And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.*

18. *But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.*

In the former part of his discourse, Peter had astonished the people by a view of their enormous guilt. Ye have killed the Prince of Life. Two months have hardly elapsed, since ye cried out with one voice, “Crucify him, crucify him.” Ye might have known him to be your King by the works which he did in the midst of you, as plainly as ye know it now by the power which he is exercising through our hands.

Perhaps he saw them affected : certainly, he was acquainted with the nature of man’s heart. Like Joseph, in former time, who excused his brethren, and said to them, “It was not you that sent me hither, but God ;”¹ so the apostle finds a palliation

¹ Genesis xiv. 8.

for the offence of the men of Israel. *And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. And the very sin, which ye ignorantly committed, has accomplished the prophecies of God, and fulfilled his predetermined plan.*

Thus soothing them, and preparing them as the dew prepares the soil for the seed after the plough has furrowed it, he proceeds in the same merciful strain.

19. *Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord ;*

20. *And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you :*

21. *Whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.*

22. *For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me ; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.*

23. *And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.*

Thus the apostle presents those thoughts to their minds, which were most suited to influence them. He sets before them a time, “when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another.” Then the “wicked,

the unbelieving, the abominable,” “shall be shut out for ever from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power.” And there was a prophecy which might well alarm them, even in their own Moses in whom they trusted. He had foretold *a prophet, whom the Lord should raise up to supersede himself, whom they should hear in all things: and every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.*

But this time of horror and destruction to the impenitent and unbelieving, should prove to the people of God a *time of refreshing: a restitution of all things*: a restitution or a restoration of what had been ruined by sin. Now, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.”² Then it “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption.” Now the elect of God are often a despised and suffering people, who “if in this life only they had hope,” would have little encouragement to persevere. But “we look,” as the same Peter says elsewhere, “we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” *The times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord*: when humble piety shall be exalted, when self-denying obedience shall be requited, when the original image which man has lost shall be completely restored.

And what were that assembly to expect, which the apostle was then addressing? What could they expect, who had refused to *hear that prophet,*

² Romans viii. 20.

who had rejected the author of this new nature, this *restorer* of all things ?

They need not yet despair. *Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come.* That when “the books shall be opened, and men shall be judged according to the things which are written in the books,” the sins which stand against you may appear to *be blotted out*, the “hand-writing of your offences taken out of the way,” through the blood of that very cross on which ye crucified the Lord of glory.

Thus he both tells them what to fear and what to hope. “Hereafter they should see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”⁵ But still they might see him as a Saviour who had favour for them, and not as a Judge who should condemn them. They might still *repent and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out.*

The whole concludes with further encouragement and consolation.

25. *Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*

26. *Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

Thus the language of soothing continues to the

³ Matthew xxvii. 64.

end. Here is a blessing, which is for *all the nations of the earth; but to you first*. “To the Jews first,” *the children of the prophets and of the covenant*. In all things God gives our nation an “advantage, great every way.” “How then shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

And see, for what he has sent his Son. Not to condemn your unbelief, and hardness of heart, and contempt of his prophetic word; but *to bless you*: to bestow on you a real and everlasting good: to bless you, *in turning away every one of you from his iniquities*.

It was said of the Lord from the first, “His name shall be called Jesus; for he shall save my people from their sins.” In that character he is here exhibited, as *sent to bless us, in turning away every one from his iniquities*.

How important, to accustom ourselves to see things as God sees them; to judge of them as they are judged of by infinite wisdom! Had the world been left to choose its own blessing, we may question whether this would have been the one desired. *To bless you*, by removing the diseases which weigh down the corruptible body,—*to bless you*, by diminishing the labour which the necessities of life require,—*to bless you*, by making less self-denial requisite, and more indulgence allowable—these, perhaps, would be natural thoughts or wishes. But the thoughts of God “are not as our thoughts;” and he *having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless us in turning away every one of us from his iniquities*.

In his sight, then, this was the blessing which men really needed ; and this was the work to effect which the Saviour came. Not to introduce a new and different law, as if God could be served with half a heart, with such a share of obedience as men might choose to pay ;—not to atone for transgression unrepented or unforsaken ;—but to restore men to the love, and service, and favour of their Creator, by turning them away from those iniquities, which separate them from him.

This is the blessing which Christ came to bring. Are we convinced that he could bring no greater blessing ? And is it our daily concern and aim to secure that blessing for ourselves ?

LECTURE IX.

PETER AND JOHN APPREHENDED AND EXAMINED BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST AND CHIEF RULERS. — A. D. 33.

ACTS iv. 1—12.

1. *And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple,¹ and the Sadducees, came upon them,*

2. *Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.*

¹ The captain of the company of Levites, who constantly attended at the temple.

3. *And they laid hands upon them, and put them in hold until the next day: for it was now even-tide.*

4. *Hocbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.*

We here find persons holding very different views and sentiments united on one point, and taking counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed. *The priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees*, made common cause against the apostles. The Sadducees were against them, *being grieved* that they opposed their own unbelief; that *they taught the people and preached the resurrection of the dead*. The priests were against them, because they preached the resurrection of the dead *through Jesus*. Neither the one or the other cared for truth: nor for anything except their own party and interests. The cause of religion and piety is often assailed by such trials; and those agree in opposing it, who, in other respects, are opposed to one another.

5. *And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and Scribes,*

6. *And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander,² and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.*

7. *And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?*

² Annas retained authority, though no longer actually high priest, which he had been for fifteen years, till Caiaphas his son-in-law was appointed in the year 26. Of John and Alexander nothing certain is known.

8. *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,*

9. *If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole ;*

10. *Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.*

11. *This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.*³

12. *Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

Not three months before, when Peter was in the palace of the high priest, a servant maid had said unto him, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth." And he denied : denied that he knew the man. He was then "a reed shaken by the wind." Now he is unmoved and fearless ; a rock which the storms beat against in vain. This can be explained in one way, as it is here explained, and in no other. He was now *filled with the Holy Ghost*. And the same power which strengthened him, instructed him too. His Lord's words are remarkably fulfilled. The Lord forewarned his apostles that they should be brought before rulers and kings for his sake. They were so. And he had also encouraged them not to be anxious beforehand what they should answer and say ;⁴ for words should be

³ The stone which the builders rejected, is become the head stone of the corner.—Psalm cxviii. 22.

⁴ Luke xxi. 19. "I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist."

put into their mouth as occasion arose. It was so. Peter at once applies to *the rulers and elders of Israel*, who had rejected their Messiah, that prophecy which, using a figure, spoke of a *stone set at nought* by earthly builders, but which should become *the head of the corner*: which the chief builder should choose out, and fix in the most important place. So it had proved. That Jesus whom they crucified had shown to how glorious a place he had been raised, in a way which they could not deny. *Even by him doth this impotent man stand before you whole.*

The apostle, however, does not dwell on this. Jesus was not raised up that he might display his power; but he displayed his power that man might believe in him, and be saved. Peter proceeds to declare, *Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*

We are led to ask, who was speaking thus? One, who three years before had been a fisherman of Galilee. Jesus saw him as he was employed in his business, and took him into his company. And to whom was this man now replying? To the chief priests and leaders of the nation. He tells them plainly, *Ye have crucified the Son of God.* He being *raised from the dead*, has given us authority. Behold the proofs of it. And in that authority we declare to you, that unless you likewise own his name, *there is no salvation for you*, and you stand condemned in the sight of God.

Very lately, Peter had been unable to conceive

why Jesus should die. Should it prove so, which he was slow to believe ; he ascribed it to no other reason than the malice of his enemies. Now he has been enlightened ; and the whole book of God's counsels lies unfolded before him.

He perceives that in the sight of God, the state of all men was a state of spiritual death. And that, when mankind were thus lying under wrath and condemnation, Jesus came, and "gave his life a ransom." That therefore he must die, that man might live ; that "as a corn of wheat, if it die, bringeth forth much fruit ;"⁵ so the death of Jesus must be the seed, and the harvest, a multitude of souls. This he confidently proclaims : "*Neither is there salvation in any other.* He that hath the Son hath life : and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."⁶

There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we may be saved. Let us be thankful that there is THAT name : that God has provided a way for the recovery of sinful man : a way through which we "may be partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world." There is, too truly, "a sentence of death," under which we have fallen ; but there is also a physician to whom we may entrust ourselves, and be safe. There is but one ark that can preserve us from the deluge ; but there is that one. All are allowed, all are invited to enter it ; to seek a refuge which they shall find secure : where they

⁵ John xii. 24.

⁶ 1 John v. 12.

“shall not come into condemnation,” but “are passed from death unto life.”⁷

LECTURE X.

THE APOSTLES ARE FORBIDDEN TO PREACH IN THE NAME OF JESUS. THEIR ANSWER.—A.D. 33.

Acts iv. 13—22.

13. *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.*

The rulers were astonished at the boldness with which they were answered; and that, not by persons who had been accustomed to plead or argue; but by *unlearned and ignorant men*: not such as could be expected to unfold the secret meaning of a prophecy, and to find in Christ Jesus that *head corner stone* of which David had spoken, and which had now been so strangely brought to light.

Observe, however, that it takes nothing from the authority of the apostles, that they were unlearned and ignorant. What they had to tell of their own knowledge did not require learning or instruction. They had to tell that they saw and conversed with Jesus after his resurrection from the grave. What more they had to tell was not from themselves, but

⁷ John v. 24.

from God : and the circumstance that they were unlearned and ignorant made them fitter channels of communication ; more likely to convey a pure and unadulterated stream.

If these priests and rulers had been left to follow their own inclination, they would have silenced the apostles at once, by laying violent hands upon them. By the providence of God this was prevented.

14. *And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.*

15. *But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,*

16. *Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem : and we cannot deny it.*

17. *But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.*

18. *And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.*

19. *But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.*

20. *For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

21. *So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people ; for all men glorified God for that which was done.*

22. *For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.*

In this narrative two things should be consi-

dered : the conduct of the rulers, and the conduct of the apostles.

1. The conduct of the rulers seems unaccountable. They saw *a notable miracle done by these men*, which, as they owned, they *could not deny*. Yet instead of showing themselves convinced, they persist in opposing. *Let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.*

This it would be impossible to explain, if we had no examples in human life of conduct inconsistent with conviction. Unhappily, such examples are too common ; it is but too common to meet with those, who having two roads open before them, knowingly choose the wrong—not, indeed, without motive. But a motive may be easily imagined ; some company with which the man is engaged ; some pleasures which he desires to enjoy, of which the right road would deprive him.

Now, had the priests and elders followed what was in their case the right road, and like their countrymen in the preceding chapter been converted and baptized in the name of Jesus ;—they must have abandoned the party to which they belonged, they must have lost the influence which they had long possessed ; and instead of being leaders of the blind people, they must have owned themselves blind, and put themselves under the instruction of the apostles : and further, as they were well aware, they must become new men and lead new lives.

If we think of this, we need no longer wonder, that though they saw the right, they followed the

wrong. Their conduct, though contrary to reason, was not contrary to human nature, but too much in accordance with it. And it is thus that Satan leads men captive at his will, when God does not see fit to interfere with his grace, and turn towards himself the bias of their heart. “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?”⁴ How can they believe, whose hearts are mainly set upon anything in this world?

2. Let us now consider the conduct of the apostles. Two ways are likewise open to them: one of safety and of ease: the other of pain and danger. If they gave up their object, and *taught no man in the name of Jesus*, they were at liberty and might continue unmolested. Otherwise, they were straitly threatened with the vengeance of those in power. But as the rulers and elders had deliberately chosen the wrong road, so these as deliberately choose the dangerous road. *Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* They incurred an immediate danger, rather than what they dreaded as a greater danger, the danger of disobeying God. They felt sure, that in preaching Jesus, they were *hearkening unto God*. And they chose to “obey God rather than man.” God had inspired their hearts with that resolution.

And there is another proof that God had in-

⁴ John v. 44.

spired their hearts, stronger even than the risk they ran. Their calmness: their moderate tone. They use no vaunting or insulting language; do not defy the rulers. Many have in other times used such language, who have been sincere, no doubt, but less subdued to the spirit of the gospel. These confidently but calmly say, *We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

Let all who follow their religion, follow their example too. “Honour all men.” “Be courteous.” “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you.” Such is the rule of the gospel; and, struck by its beauty and excellence, many “who obey not the word,” may yet “be won” to follow it, when they behold the confidence, coupled with meekness, which it inspires.

LECTURE XI.

THE APOSTLES, THREATENED BY THE RULERS,
APPEAL TO GOD.—UNION OF THE BODY OF
BELIEVERS.—A.D. 33.

ACTS iv. 23—37.

23. *And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.*

24. *And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is :*

25. *Who by the mouth of thy servant David, hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ?*

26. *The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.¹*

27. *For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,*

28. *For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.*

29. *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings : and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,*

30. *By stretching forth thine hand to heal : and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.*

31. *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together ; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

St. Paul has said, “ When I am weak, then am I strong.”² When placed in circumstances which bring the sense of my own weakness most closely home to me, this feeling of need casts me like a child on the bosom of my Father. His strength becomes mine, and I am weak no longer. So the apostles here. Of themselves they could do nothing. A few obscure and friendless individuals against all

¹ Ps. xi. 3.

² 2 Cor. xii. 10.

the power and influence of Jerusalem, must be scattered like dust before the wind. But going from the presence of the council, they apply directly to Him in whose cause they were engaged : and they are no longer weak : they speak confidently concerning their adversaries, as of men who were held with bit and bridle, who could go no further than was permitted them : who were *gathered together* by their own malice and worldly interests, but could only *do whatsoever the hand and counsel of God had determined before to be done*. Supported by this conviction, they “lay their help upon Him that is mighty ;” they cast themselves upon God, and leave to Him the issue.

One strong ground of their confidence, is what they find in scripture. They find there reason to expect opposition. They find that it was nothing new or strange for *the kings of the earth to stand up, and the rulers to take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Christ*, his anointed servant. David was anointed of God to be king over Israel. And against him the *heathen had raged, and the people imagined vain things*. “He that sitteth in heaven had laughed them to scorn :” had set at nought their efforts, and scattered their proud imaginations. Now, Jesus had been anointed to fulfil the prophecies, and “sit on the throne of David.” And now, too, against him, and against those who were going forth in his name, the people were gathered together. But the same strength which had subdued the Philistines formerly, and established David on his throne, might now likewise

subdue the enemies of him whom David had represented ; the opposers of David's son and David's Lord.

Such is one great use of scripture. It encourages and consoles, whilst it directs and governs. It supports the Christian during his whole progress. It warns him of the enemies which he must encounter, and teaches him to expect the difficulties which he finds.

32. *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul : neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own ; but they had all things common.*

33. *And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus : and great grace was upon them all.*

34. *Neither was there any among them that lacked : for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,*

35. *And laid them down at the apostles' feet : and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*

36. *And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,*

37. *Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

“ The kingdom of heaven,” as the Lord had said, “ is like unto treasure hid in a field : the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”³ Joses had found that treasure, hid

³ Matt. xiii. 44.

in the apostles and the doctrine which they were proclaiming. The desire of this absorbed all other affection ; and *having land, he sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.* What ! that he might purchase the kingdom of heaven ? that he might take eternal life in exchange ? No. But he joined himself with the apostles in one common interest, and all contributed together whatever might promote the object of their hearts' desire. The apostles were themselves engaged in bearing that testimony which they were especially appointed to bear ; in “ preaching through Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” They were occupied in declaring the truth as it had been revealed to them ; in confuting adversaries, in baptizing those who were convinced ; in regulating also the operations of the society now formed, and daily increasing. And as these must be supported, must live ; and had left their ordinary means of livelihood ;—and as many, no doubt, of the converted brethren, were also deprived of theirs :—provision was made for them that lacked, by the generosity of others. *As many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet : and distribution was made to every man according as he had need.* They had discovered a new country : there, from this time, were their thoughts, their affections fixed : the apostles were to lead them into it ; those already of the apostles' party were to accompany them ; and nothing should be spared which might advance the common cause, and bring them all to the promised land.

There is nothing extraordinary in all this. It is merely a proof that they were sincere. Such was the natural effect of believing what these Christians believed. Treasure was laid up for them in heaven : and where their treasure was, there was their heart also. Thenceforward the things of this world were only valuable to them, as they might be used to promote their own salvation and that of others. And may all learn, in their different circumstances, so to “ make to themselves friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when this world fails, they may be received into everlasting habitations.” ⁴

LECTURE XII.

DECEIT AND DEATH OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.—A.D. 33.

ACTS v. 1—11.

1. *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,*

2. *And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

Mention had been before made of Joses, or Bar-

⁴ See Luke xvi. 9.

nabas, who having land, sold it, and gave up the price to the use of the apostles. The motive which actuated him, might as justly actuate all the disciples. All had the same reason for zeal and disinterestedness. Therefore, not to do as he and many others did, would look like a want of zeal: would lower in the esteem of the infant society those who refused to follow such an example. Not that any such sacrifice was required: there was no obligation laid on any. While the land remained, it was "their own:" and after it was sold, the price was "in their own power." But those who did thus part with houses or lands for the Lord's sake, must needs appear to advantage.

Ananias with Sapphira his wife felt this. It grieved them to be held in inferior esteem. And this shows that grace had not possession of their hearts. Otherwise they would have been indifferent, comparatively indifferent, towards public opinion. If there were any sufficient reason why they should retain a part of their property, they would have retained it. Like St. Paul, they would have thought it "a very small thing to be judged of men, or of man's judgment: for that He who judged them is the Lord."¹ But there was no such reason: they could plead none: the only reason was that they loved and valued their possessions, and had not faith enough to resign what they loved and valued, and to look for treasure in heaven. Therefore they *sold a possession, and kept back part*

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 3.

of the price, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. They had two objects in view: the reputation of zeal and liberality; and the reservation of a private store.

“Love not the world,” says St. John, “nor the things that are in the world.” Of the things which are in the world, those two which are commonly most esteemed, most dearly purchased, and most hardly parted with, are property, and good repute; the favour of the party with which men live. These two things were a snare to Ananias and Sapphira. The love of God and heaven was not strong enough to prevail over the love of the world. Satan took advantage of their state of heart; he saw it open and prepared to receive him;² so he entered in, and hurried them to their destruction.

3. *But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?*

4. *While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.*

5. *And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all those that heard these things.*

6. *And the young men arose, wound him up,³ and carried him out, and buried him.*

² See Matt. xii. 44.

³ In linen clothes for his burial. When Lazarus was raised, he “came forth bound hand and foot with grave clothes.” Burials, in the East, take place immediately after death.

The Holy Ghost was with the apostles, at this time, not in that ordinary measure in which he is with all the people of God ; but in that extraordinary degree which gave them the power of “ discerning spirits,”⁴ and of knowing what is in the heart. Therefore, to suppose that the apostles could be deceived by falsehood, was to suppose that the Holy Ghost could be deceived : to attempt an imposture upon the apostles, was to deny the existence or the power of the Holy Ghost : to *lie, not unto men, but unto God*. And God saw fit by a sudden judgment to show the heinousness of such hypocrisy in his sight : to show that “ there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed ; neither hid, that shall not be known.”⁵ Had this truth been present to the mind of these two persons, or had they been so influenced by faith as to act upon it, they would not have committed their sin. What shall it profit us, they would have argued within themselves, if for a while in the esteem of man we are held to be thus generous ? That feeling which now lies below, hidden in the heart, and covered by an outward appearance of zeal, will be revealed and brought to light hereafter before the whole assembled world.

So little, and therefore so justly, would the

⁴ 1 Cor. xii. 10. Without this power, the apostles could not have set the infant church in order. They might have been deceived as to the character and qualifications of those whom they most trusted ; and such mistakes at that moment would be fatal.

⁵ Luke xii. 2.

praise or blame of man be valued, if we could always keep in view the day when “God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.”⁶

7. *And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.*

8. *And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.*

9. *Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them that have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.*

10. *Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.*

11. *And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.*

Thus this unhappy transaction, awful in itself, was over-ruled for good. It confirmed the power of the apostles; showed “that God was with them of a truth,” and gave authority to all they did in establishing the church. *Great fear*, we are told, *came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these words.* And fear, rightly directed, is both proper and salutary to such a creature as man.

⁶ Rom. ii. 16.

⁷ To *tempt* or prove the Spirit: as if to see, whether He would detect the fraud. Thus the Israelites are said to have *tempted God* in the wilderness by doubting his power.

Peter did not require her answer, for his own information; but he elicited it, to prove the guilt of Sapphira in the face of those assembled.

The fear of God, and the dread of sin, as displeasing to God, is the greatest blessing to the soul. This awful example would produce and cherish it. Great fear might well come upon all the disciples, when they saw before their eyes the consequence of sin. This consequence we are ready to acknowledge. The difficulty is, to feel a due conviction of the truth. We confess, that “the wages of sin is death.” But “because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”⁸ Here the sentence *was* executed speedily : here that judgment was witnessed, which it is part of our probation to believe ; to receive on faith. And the whole event may well incline us to pray with David, “Keep back thy servant, O Lord, from presumptuous sins : let them not have dominion over me ; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.”⁹

⁸ Eccles. viii. 11.

⁹ Psalm xix. 13.

LECTURE XIII.

THE APOSTLES ARE IMPRISONED AND MIRACULOUSLY SET AT LIBERTY.—A.D. 33.

ACTS v. 12—32.

12. *And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.*¹

13. *And of the rest*² *durst no man join himself to them : but the people magnified them.*

14. *And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)*

15. *Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.*

16. *There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits : and they were healed every one.*

17. *Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is of the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation,*

¹ As before, chapter iii. 11. There they had their principal station : there they might be regularly found, both by their own party, and by those who desired to resort to them.

² Of the wavering and undecided, like those who had just now fallen under their hypocrisy.

18. *And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.*

19. *But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,*

20. *Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.*

Our Lord had promised, that the gates of hell should not prevail against the church,³ which Peter and John were now engaged in building. The promise implies that the powers of hell should be employed against it. They were employed. The high priest, ungodly himself,⁴ or he would not have united with the unbelieving Sadducees, sends officers to apprehend the men who were daring “to preach through Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” *They laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.* If, at this important crisis, they had been permitted to remain there for any length of time, Satan might have prevailed. The shepherds being smitten, the sheep would have been scattered abroad. Therefore they must not be allowed to live there: the prison cannot hold them: *the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple all the words of this life.* The doors of the prison were opened, and the gates of hell were closed. The servants of Christ should still stand up in the

³ Matthew xvi. 18.

⁴ As is believed, a Sadducee, and certainly connected with that party: chapter v. 17.

most public place, and proclaim “the words of eternal life.” Nor was there delay with them.

21. *And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.*

22. *But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,*

23. *Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.*

24. *Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.*

25. *Then came one and told them, saying, Behold the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.*

26. *Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: (for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.)*

27. *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,*

28. *Saying, Did not we straitly command you, that ye should not teach in this name? and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.*

29. *Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*

30. *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.*

31. *Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*

32. *And we are his witnesses of these things ; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.*

If God has raised up Jesus from the dead, there must be witnesses to attest this, and to make it known. We are such witnesses, say the apostles. But you doubt us. We have another witness, the Holy Ghost, with whom God has anointed us, and whom he *has given*, in various measures, *to them that obey him* : to them who “obey the truth,” and do not contend against his revelation.

For what purpose, then, had he *raised up Jesus* ? *He has exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour* : a Prince who should rule his people, and lead them in the way of eternal life ; a Saviour, who should *give repentance to Israel*. For he had come, bearing his Father’s message of forgiveness. Like some earthly sovereign, whose subjects had rebelled against him, God has sent a proclamation of pardon, if they will return to their allegiance ; and the bearer of his message is his only Son. “Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you ; and to your God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Nay, should any hesitate, and doubt the reality of such good-will ; let them know that the very Son who bears the message has suffered in his own body the penalty of their sin ; has died, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring them to God.”⁵

Thus was Jesus *giving repentance to Israel* : giving the means, the opportunity, the invitation, to repent : if they would range themselves under

⁵ 1 Peter iii. 18.

him as the Prince of life, and acknowledge him as their Saviour from the wrath to come.

There is another gift of repentance, without which every offer of mercy falls barren and unfruitful, like seed scattered on the high-way. There must be the gift of an humble and contrite heart. To the Pharisee, who, when he “went up into the temple to pray,” thanked God that he was not as other men, and had not, like them, sins to repent of:—what was it to him or such as him, that Jesus was raised up to be “an Advocate with the Father? that he is the propitiation for our sins?” A new heart and a right spirit must be given him, so that he should perceive his real guiltiness, and smite upon his breast, saying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Till then, he would neither feel nor understand that mercy, which had *given repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*

It is the same, wherever the gospel is preached. He who has *given repentance*, must also bestow the heart to claim the blessing.

How is it with ourselves? Has he given us eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to understand, that through unbelief his mercy may not be lost upon us? This admits of a simple test, furnished by this very passage. Is he our PRINCE, and are we ruled by him? Then he is our SAVIOUR, to whom we have committed our souls. Is he our SAVIOUR, who has our souls in trust? Then he is our PRINCE, and we are ruled by him: we are studying his law; we make his will our standard, and his glory our principal desire.

LECTURE XIV.

GAMALIEL'S ADVICE TO THE COUNCIL LEAVES
THE APOSTLES AT LIBERTY.—A. D. 33.

Acts v. 33—42.

33. *When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.*

No wonder, if these rulers *were cut to the heart* by truths which they could not deny, maintained in their very presence in defiance of their authority. They saw but one remedy ; and *took counsel to slay* the apostles.

Here a higher power interposed. The purposes of God required that the apostles should not be cut off now ; nay, that they should be at liberty to declare the truth committed to them. A time would come, when persecution, imprisonment, death itself, would be as seed to the church ; would add to the harvest of the gospel. But that time was not yet. The christian church was as yet but smoking flax, or rising flame ; a drop of water would quench it, a breath of wind extinguish it. Those means might now arrest its progress, which hereafter would quicken and extend its growth. The doctrine must be preached : must be preached “with the Holy Ghost, and with power,” and be received

into many hearts : companies of believers must be united, and the christian faith show a real form, and take a substantial existence. It must not be left as a slender stem, which a single arm might tear up ; but must firmly fix its roots : then they would extend on every side : its branches would be growing : denied access in one spot, it would force its way elsewhere, and everywhere find some nourishment ; would spread its shelter widely, and scatter its “ leaves for the healing of the nations.”

All this was the will of God concerning his gospel ; and for this, as we shall see, he provided in an unexpected manner.

34. *Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space.*

35. *And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves, what ye intend to do as touching these men.*

36. *For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody, to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves : who was slain ; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nought.*

37. *After this man rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him : he also perished, and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.*

38. *And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel, or this work be of men, it will come to nought :*

39. *But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.*

Is this advice given by a friend or an enemy? Surprising as it seems, Gamaliel, who speaks thus, was a *Pharisee, a doctor of the law, held in high reputation* as a leader in his sect: of that sect which from the beginning had most vehemently opposed the doctrine of Jesus. Perhaps he was now affected by enmity against the Sadducees, who were foremost in this persecution; and a bad motive was over-ruled for a good end. Perhaps he was affected by a better influence; his mind had been struck by the miraculous exercise of power which he could not deny. But whatever may have led him thus to cast his protection over the apostles, he certainly declared with perfect truth, *If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought*. Many things prevail in the world and succeed, which are not of God, but of men. But if *this work* had not been of God, no pains were needed to overthrow it. The doctrine which the apostles were publishing, was not a doctrine which men would be eager to embrace: not one which without indisputable proof they would be persuaded to receive. Men are not willing to confess themselves guilty. But the apostles declare that “the whole world is guilty before God.” Men would not be forward to believe, that one whom they had put to death upon the cross, was the Son of God; and that there was salvation in no other, but in him who had not preserved himself. But the apostles declared, that there is “no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Men are not willing to forsake the evil of their ways, and to

lead a new life, following the commandments of God. But the apostles required them to do this ; to “ put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts ; and be renewed in the spirit of their mind.” Just reason had Gamaliel for saying, that if the doctrine *were of men*, it must *come to nought*.

Even if a ruler, with sovereign power, had issued a command, that Jesus Christ should be acknowledged by all his subjects as “ a Prince and a Saviour :”¹ he might have succeeded in some countries ; but he would not have succeeded among the Jews. Their national belief was too strong to admit of any change.

On the other hand, had the chief priests and elders, with the Pharisees, and those to whom the people were accustomed to look up ;—had those in a body consented to the doctrine of the apostles, and joined them in proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah who was to come, it is possible that they would have been followed.

But they who were now going about to teach this doctrine were unlearned men, unknown men, unfriended men ; they had no influence which could give currency to even the most evident truth or popular opinion ; and all those who did possess such influence were opposed to them. Could they possibly establish such improbable doctrines, such unpalatable opinions, as that God had made that same Jesus whom they had crucified both Lord and Christ ?

No. Gamaliel might safely put the matter upon

¹ We have such a case in Daniel.

the test which he proposed, *If this work were of men, it would come to nought*: and they need not endanger their own authority, and offend the people, by forcibly endeavouring to overthrow what must shortly fall by its own weakness.

40. *And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*

41. *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*

42. *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*

Rejoicing, that they were *counted worthy to suffer shame*. In themselves, there is nothing in shame or ill-treatment to cause rejoicing. And yet the feelings of the apostles can be understood. They are the feelings of men, employed as the apostles were, in the cause of an extraordinary Benefactor. He has left us a command,—so they would argue,—he has given us a duty to perform. We are engaged in it; and we are encountered by opposition: we are threatened, if we persevere. After what we have suffered, and may expect to suffer, we should not persevere, if we held his memory in light esteem. Let us then *rejoice* that we have the means of testifying our gratitude and reverence; that we have been *counted worthy* to have something of that same mind which was in Jesus himself, when “for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.”

Such would be the feelings of genuine thankfulness : a sense of infinite obligation would be thus shown. Through the medium of those feelings shed abroad upon the heart, the Holy Spirit filled them with zeal and boldness and endurance.

The like qualities will be found, wherever a like sense of obligation is sincerely felt. There will be zeal and boldness in the cause of the gospel : there will be readiness to undergo any inconvenience which may arise. And because this is a sure test of the state of the heart, the Lord has said, “ Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this sinful and adulterous generation ; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.” ⁴

LECTURE XV.

SEVEN DEACONS APPOINTED TO MANAGE THE
TEMPORAL CONCERNS OF THE COMMUNITY. —
A. D. 33.

Acts vi. 1—6.

1. *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians¹ against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.*

⁴ Mark viii. 38.

¹ By the *Grecians* are meant persons of Jewish birth, but

2. *Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*

3. *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*

4. *But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*

The body of Christians which had been formed in the manner described in the foregoing chapters, presented a singular case. There was a community who, together with their families, must have consisted of thirty or forty thousand persons, of whom a large proportion were without the regular support arising from ordinary business or labour. Some, we must suppose, had been deprived of this, directly or indirectly, in consequence of their conversion. The enmity with which they would be treated, as departing from the common faith, and acknowledging Jesus to be the Christ, would pursue them in their vocations, and ruin their worldly business.² Others, like the apostles themselves, had abandoned their means of livelihood: their minds being wholly occupied with the interests of their new faith, or with the actual duties of extending it. For the support of these, we saw in the second and fourth chapters that a common fund was

settled in foreign countries, and only sojourners in Jerusalem, called Grecians, because in those countries the language of Greece was generally spoken.

² See Hebrews x. 33—34.

created by the liberality of others who had possessions. Acts ii. 44. "All that believed were together, and had all things common : and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." Acts iv. 35. "As many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet ; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

The creation of such a fund, by the negotiations attending the sale of property ; and, still more, the management of it afterwards, would be matter of no small difficulty. If out of all the baptized converts, only a thousand families applied for relief, there would be employment for more time than the apostles could spare. They must become *servers of tables*, keepers of accounts, instead of dispensers of *the word of God*.

Moreover, there arose a murmuring of the foreign Jews against the natives of Judea, as if their destitute families, and especially their *widows* or women, *were neglected in the daily ministration*.³ It is not probable that there was just ground for this complaint. It is far more likely that it arose out of those feelings of jealousy, which in nature are grievously predominant, and are hardly kept down by divine grace. Experience was sure to

At *χήραι*, are manifestly destitute female relations. The christian *widows*, properly so called, could not yet be numerous. The word is used in the same sense in 1 Timothy v. 9.

prove that such feelings would exist, when numbers were to be supplied out of a common fund, to which all had an equal claim.

There is at first sight something very pleasing in the thoughts of a community supplied as these first Christians were. How delightful, we are inclined to say; there were “none among them that lacked :” none who had more than their necessities required. What was superfluous to one family supplied what was deficient to another.

This, however, is a state of things which cannot last long in this world. He who ordained that man should “eat bread by the sweat of his brow,” also ordained that every man should eat the bread of his own labour : should support, not his neighbour, but himself : should depend upon his own exertions, and enjoy his own possessions. It was only at Jerusalem, only at the first creation of the christian church, that this general rule was interrupted. No such practice prevailed, when new churches were gradually formed at Antioch, and Ephesus, and Philippi, and throughout the whole world. St. Paul speaks very vehemently on this point : saying, (1 Timothy v. 8,) “If any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

There would, no doubt, be times, when a man could not provide for his own. And then another ordinance comes in, and supplies a remedy, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things (the wants, the interests) of

others.” “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate.” “Whoso have this world’s good, and seeth his brother hath need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”⁴ To seek out, and to assist, the proper objects, is the business of christian charity. And of such assistance on the one side, and dependence on the other, the result is, mutual good will. The one party gives that which is his own; that which he might retain as his own, that which he denies himself to part with. The other receives that to which he has no claim, except through the christian principles of his neighbour.

Here, however, at Jerusalem, was a common fund, to which all had an equal claim. And this event shows us the wisdom of the general ordinance, and the danger of annulling it. The multitude, who were so lately “of one heart and one soul,” are now likely to be divided. Even their common faith and peculiar circumstances could not prevent *a murmuring*. Some thought that others obtained too much, and that they and their families *were neglected*.

For the present emergency, it was needful to maintain the system which had been begun. The apostles, however, provided, that as far as in them lay, there should be no reasonable cause of discontent. *Look ye out*, they say to the disciples

⁴ Phillip. ii. 4.—1 Timothy vi. 17.—1 John iii. 17.

assembled together, choose for yourselves, *seven men*, (that number may suffice for the present,) *seven men of honest report*, (of known and approved character,) *full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*, (men seen to be living under the influence of the Spirit of God,) *whom we may appoint over this business*.

5. *And the saying pleased the whole multitude : and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch :* ⁵

6. *Whom they set before the apostles : and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*

Laid their hands upon them. So Moses (Num. xxvii. 22) by divine command took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation : and he *laid his hands upon him*, and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded.

It was the solemn mode of invoking the grace of God, and commending the individual to his blessing. When young children were brought to Jesus “he laid his hands upon them, and blessed them.”⁶ And one of the signs which were to accompany the apostles was, that “they should lay their hands upon the sick, and they should recover.”⁷

Thus solemnly devoted to their office, the deacons

⁵ The *Grecians* were the complaining party. And it is remarkable that the names of those chosen to set the matter right are *Grecian* names. So careful were they to avoid the appearance of favour and partiality.

⁶ Matthew xix. 15.

⁷ Mark xvi. 18.

entered upon their charge. It was not temporary. We find from the epistle to Timothy, that deacons were stated ministers of the church. Neither was it merely secular; Stephen, as we shall soon see, continued to preach the gospel: Philip, as we shall soon see, did not hesitate to baptize. They were still engaged, therefore, in whatever might promote the progress of the gospel. But especially, at present, they were to attend to the temporal affairs of the church, and were not devoted so entirely as the apostles *to prayer and the ministry of the word*.

Only a few months had elapsed since the death of Jesus. And already was a community united together, acknowledging him as their Lord and their God; and so numerous, as to require seven persons to administer their property. Surely the words of Gamaliel were verified: and “this counsel and this work” was not of men, but of God.

LECTURE XVI.

STEPHEN ACCUSED OF SPEAKING AGAINST THE
LAW OF MOSES.—A. D. 33.

ACTS vi. 7—15.

7. *And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

“Thus mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed,” fulfilling the promises which Jesus had uttered, answering the expectations which he had raised. Even a large number of the priests perceived the truth; did not adhere to the types and shadows of the law, but became *obedient to the faith* which explained and realised them. There was much to hinder this, unless the Spirit of God had enlightened them. To hinder it, there was that prejudice which it is so hard to overcome: that attachment to the habits which they had followed, the sentiments in which they had been brought up: that course of thought which St. Paul remembered in himself, when he said, looking back upon former times—“I verily thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”¹ On the other hand they might reason, that now they perceived the purport of the ordinances of the law: that all was now cleared up, which in the sacrifices which they had offered day by day and “year by year continually,”² they had found it hard to understand. Thus “the Spirit of God might witness with their own spirit;” might work with their minds within, and open them to receive “the light which was come into the world.” It did so. “God had not cast away his people.” There was “a remnant according to the election of grace.”³ *A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith:* but “the rest were blinded;”⁴ as in the

¹ Acts xxvi. 9.² Heb. x. 1, &c.³ Rom. xi. 1—5.⁴ Ib. 7.

days of old, when they were but few—not few in themselves, nor few in the sight of God—but few in comparison of the whole nation—who had not bowed the knee to Baal.⁵

8. *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*

9. *Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia, and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.*⁶

10. *And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*

11. *Then they suborned men which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.*

12. *And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,*

13. *And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.*

14. *For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*

15. *And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*

⁵ 1 Kings xix. 18.

⁶ The different foreign Jews residing at Jerusalem had separate synagogues, and schools attached to them. Such were the Grecians, Alexandrians, &c. The Libertines were the descendants of those who had once been slaves, and had obtained freedom. As far as is known, it is a Latin term. Libertus, a bondman made free : Libertinus, the son of a Libertus.

When Ahab's queen, Jezebel, suborned witnesses for the destruction of Naboth, they used direct falsehoods, affirming, Naboth "did blaspheme God and the king."⁷ The false witnesses who appeared against our Lord took another course: they misrepresented words actually spoken. "Two false witnesses came and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." The same kind of falsehood is used against Stephen. The meaning of his words is perverted. For without doubt he would argue in a manner like that represented here: *This Jesus shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.* He would show the people, that in rejecting the gospel, they were "fighting against God:" who would come, as *this Jesus* had foretold—would "destroy the wicked husbandmen" who had rejected his messengers, nay, had killed his own, his well-beloved Son, and would "burn up their city."⁸ He would not deny, that *the customs which Moses delivered* were now changed. The days were come, when the Lord would "make a new and a better covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."⁹ For the law was a preparation for the gospel: and now that was revealed for which preparation had been so long made. Moses was the forerunner of Christ; and Moses must now "decrease,"¹ for one greater than Moses had appeared. There should be no more sacrifice for sin. God had accepted one

⁷ 1 Kings xxi. 18. ⁸ See Matt. xxii. 2—7; xxi. 28—41.

⁹ See Heb. viii. 8, &c.

¹ John iii. 30.

great sacrifice, by which they that believe “are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.”² Thus Stephen would argue: and therefore the leaders of the different synagogues *set up false witnesses which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.*

We do not blame these people, because they did not lightly and hastily renounce the ordinances and *change the customs which Moses had delivered.* These had been their distinction; their “advantage great every way:” and it was their duty to make sure that the same authority which had established, had also superseded them. Their sin was, that they would not receive the proofs of this, which God was giving. Their opposition to the gospel arose not from righteous zeal, but from enmity and self-interest. *Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders among the people.* Did they inquire by what means and in what name he did these things? We are told, that they *disputed with him, and were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.* And then, instead of yielding to conviction, and acknowledging that “God had visited his people,”—they *suborned men* who should attribute a wrong meaning to his words: *they stirred up the people and set up false witnesses which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.*

² Ch. xiii. 39.

Evidently, therefore, these were they, whose “minds the god of this world had blinded.” There was a hindrance in themselves, why “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should not shine upon them.”³ “They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil:” because they were seeking this world first, because their own interests were dearer to them than the glory of God.

LECTURE XVII.

STEPHEN COMMENCES HIS DEFENCE.—A. D. 33.

Acts vii. 1—16.

1. *Then said the high priest, Are these things so?*

2. *And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken: The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,*

3. *And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.*

4. *Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.*

Stephen had been accused of speaking blasphemous

³ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

words against Moses and against God : and of affirming that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses had delivered.

This accusation he meets, in the first place, by going back to their early history, and showing the origin of that favour which his countrymen had so long enjoyed. God had called their ancestor Abraham, not because he dwelt in Canaan, but for the purpose of settling him there. Abraham was living in Mesopotamia ;¹ went from thence, under God's providence, to Haran, and thence to Canaan. There was no reason, from an origin like this, to suppose that God's favour was irrevocably fixed upon them and their country, and that their place and nation should never be destroyed.

From this opening, it seems to have been in Stephen's mind to show the assembly how many mysterious things had taken place in the dispensations of God ; how little it could have been discovered at many periods of their own history what his intentions were. That he, whom God had sent to be the Saviour of the world, should be allowed to suffer death, appeared to the Jewish nation unaccountable and inexplicable. Now Stephen, being thus placed before the council, does not confine himself to the mere ground of accusation made against him : but takes the opportunity of recalling to the minds of his hearers many things which were likely to shake their self-confidence, change

¹ At Ur of the Chaldees, his birth-place. See Gen. xi. 31, and xii. 4.

the current of their thoughts, and so remove their unbelief. Abraham had obeyed the call of God ; had left *his country and his kindred* : and it might be supposed that in *the land which God should show him* a large and rich inheritance would be granted him. It was not so.

5. *And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on : yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child*

6. *And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land ; and that they should bring them into bondage, and intreat them evil four hundred years.*

7. *And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage, will I judge, said God ; and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.*

8. *And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day : and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.*

Not only, then, had Abraham no inheritance, but a long period of trial and affliction was to be endured, before the expected blessing should be given. The seed of the faithful Abraham must *sojourn in a strange land* : must suffer all the hardships of bondage, and that for many years ; and not till all this had come to pass, should the promise be fulfilled. It was, however, secured by covenant : the time should come, when the nation to which they had been in bondage should be judged : and the people should *come forth* in the

way that God had designed, and *serve* him, and be his “chosen nation, his peculiar people.”

From all this the Jews might infer, that there might be something in the divine mind, which man may neither expect nor comprehend. His counsels are accomplishing in a way that we know not. And so, in their present conduct regarding the Gospel of Christ, they might be speaking peace to themselves, whilst sudden destruction was coming upon them unawares. The very means which they took to secure themselves, might bring about the evil which they feared.

To this purpose, there was a remarkable instance in the case of Joseph, of which Stephen next reminds them.

9. *And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt : but God was with him,*

10. *And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt ; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.*

11. *Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt, and Chanaan, and great affliction : and our fathers found no sustenance.*

12. *But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.*

13. *And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren ; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.*

14. *Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.*

15. *So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he and our fathers,*

16. *And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem.*²

Stephen adverts to these facts, without drawing out the inference to which they might lead. But we cannot help remarking how nearly the case of Joseph resembled the case of Jesus.

Joseph was innocent, yet in trouble: nay, in trouble for this very reason, because he was innocent. The envy of his brethren, whom he so greatly excelled; the malice of the wife of Potiphar, which he refused to conciliate,—these were the cause of the affliction into which he was thrown.

So whilst the Lord Jesus was upon earth. Had he not convicted the Scribes of their covetousness, and the Pharisees of their hypocrisy, and the chief priests and rulers of unfaithfulness to their trust, he would have been unmolested by them. “For envy they delivered him” to Pilate.³

It was, however, through the injustice done to Joseph that the purpose of God was answered. In the sight of men, it might appear that Joseph “was smitten of God, and afflicted.” But on the contrary we are told, *that God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions.* It was part of the plan, which God had before revealed to

² In the course of copying, an error has crept in here, and the name of Abraham has been inserted instead of that of Jacob. It appears by Gen. xxxiii. 19, and Joshua xxiv. 32, that Jacob was the purchaser of the sepulchre in which Joseph’s bones were laid.

³ See Matt. xxvii. 18. Mark xv. 10.

Abraham, that *his seed should sojourn in a strange land*. His brethren's malice sent Joseph down to Egypt. His captivity in Egypt saved his father and his brethren from famine.

And so it was by the death of Jesus, procured through false and malicious accusation, that God was preparing salvation : salvation even for some out of those very enemies who had before despised and rejected their deliverer. As the family of Jacob would have perished, if Joseph had not been sold into Egypt, and imprisoned in Egypt :—so if Christ had not died, that remnant of the family of Jacob, and of Isaac, and of Abraham, would have perished everlastingly, concerning whom we lately read, that they were “ added to the church daily,” became “ obedient to the faith,” were “ converted” and “ baptized,” were “ saved.”

Things so remarkable and unexpected, strongly remind us of the conclusion to which St. Paul is brought, after a similar strain of reflection. (Rom. xi. 33.) “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor ? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things : to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

LECTURE XVIII.

CONTINUATION OF STEPHEN'S DISCOURSE.

A. D. 33.

Acts vii. 17—36.

17. *But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,*

18. *Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.*

19. *The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.*

20. *In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months :*

21. *And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.*

22. *And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words, and in deeds.*

Thus silently and unobservedly the counsels of God proceed. Perhaps it was in the mind of Stephen to point this out to his countrymen. For a long series of years their forefathers, the favoured people of God, were *evil entreated*. "Their lives were made bitter with hard bondage."¹ An attempt was even formed to cut off the whole race. But

¹ Ex. i. 14.

this very attempt proved the means through which effect was given to the divine purposes. If the command had not been issued, that no male children should be preserved alive, Moses would not have been cast out from his father's house, would have been brought up as a bondman like his father, instead of being nourished as a prince is nourished, and instructed *in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*.

Yet Moses, thus designed of God for the deliverance of the nation, was at first rejected by his own brethren.

23. *And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.*

24. *And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian :*

25. *For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them : but they understood not.*

26. *And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren ; why do ye wrong one to another ?*

27. *But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us ?*

28. *Wilt thou kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday ?*

29. *Then fled Moses at this saying ; and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.*

Moses supposed, that his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them. So it might have been expected, that when the Messiah came, he should be recognised by those

whose Saviour he was to prove. “The lord of the vineyard said, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.”² And we consent to the justness of the expectation. But they did not reverence him; they did not recognise him; they did not acknowledge him to be the Son of God: and when he so revealed himself, they treated it as blasphemy, and resolved, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” And so the Israelites had dealt with Moses. They thrust him away, saying, “Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?”³

If, however, God were to abandon men to the consequences of their hardness of heart and perverse will, who would be saved? He did not then abandon the Israelites “whom he foreknew:” whom he had destined to be “high above all nations in praise, and in name, and in honour.”⁴

30. *And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him [Moses] in the wilderness of Mount Sina, an angel of the Lord, in a flame of fire in a bush.*

31. *When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,*

32. *Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.*

33. *Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.*

34. *I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and*

² Luke xx. 13.

³ Ex. xi. 14.

⁴ Deut. xxvi. 19.

am come down to deliver them: and now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

35. *This Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer, by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.*

36. *He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.*

It was a remarkable coincidence, that as God made that same Moses whom the people had refused, their *ruler and deliverer*, so he had also “made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ.” And throughout both the former and the latter history, we have a striking proof how much better is God to man, than man to himself. We saw the Israelites averse to the deliverance which God had prepared for them: putting away, as far as depended on themselves, his merciful designs. And is this singular? Does it belong to the Israelites alone; or is it a history, a picture, of man’s heart? What is every sin that is committed, but a rejection of God’s mercy, like the rejection of Christ Jesus by the Jewish nation? God offers us happiness: but it must be in the way of righteousness: and we are as unwilling to receive on those terms the happiness which he offers, as the Israelites were to be ruled by Moses, or the Jewish people to acknowledge the Messiah. And as the Israelites would never have been redeemed from Egyptian bondage, if the mercy of God had not been too great to leave them to themselves: so

will the history of every soul admitted into the heavenly kingdom, be a record of God's patience and long-suffering. "For thus saith the Lord God: I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not: I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."⁵

LECTURE XIX.

CONTINUATION OF STEPHEN'S DISCOURSE.

A. D. 33.

ACTS vii. 37—53.

37. *This is that Moses which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.*¹

38. *This is he that was in the church in the wilderness, with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers; who received the lively oracles² to give unto us:*

39. *To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt;*

40. *Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us:*

⁵ Isaiah xlii. 16.

¹ Deut. xviii. 15—20.

² The oracles or words of the living God, not such as the heathen listened to, from senseless idols.

for as for this Moses which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

41. *And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the work of their own hands.*

42. *Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven ; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts, and sacrifices, by the space of forty years in the wilderness ?³*

43. *Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them : and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.*

Stephen had been accused of speaking blasphemous words against Moses. He shows how little he deserves this accusation by the honour which he ascribes to Moses. And then he turns the argument against his opposers, as the Lord Jesus himself had done. He had upbraided his Jewish adversaries, because, professing to follow Moses, they had not understood his words. (John v. 45, 46.) “Do not think that I will accuse you unto the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.” In the same manner Stephen reminds them, how Moses had declared, that *God should raise a prophet*

³ Amos v. 25—27. “Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch, (an idol of the Philistines,) and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts.”

up unto them of their brethren, like unto him: him should they hear. That prophet had now been raised up; yet they refused to hear him.

Nay, neither had Moses been obeyed by their fathers in the wilderness, though *an angel spake to him in mount Sinai*, and though he *received the living oracles*, the words of the living God,—the commandments “which if a man do he shall even live in them.”⁴ Yet him they *would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.*

It is therefore nothing new, if the people should have rejected God’s messenger: if the builders should have refused the stone, which God had made the corner-stone; if they should have disbelieved his promises, and rebelled against his will. He that was with God at Sinai, was opposed; *they thrust him from them.* Neither would it be new, if they despised the good things intended for them; for so their fathers had in their hearts preferred Egypt rather than Canaan. Neither would it be new, if they were to draw down God’s anger upon themselves, by refusing his mercy; or if they should be deserted by him, because they “did not like to retain him in their knowledge.”⁵ God *gave up* their ancestors *to worship the host of heaven*: so he might once more turn, and give up them. He had sent their ancestors into captivity beyond Babylon. Let them beware, lest a worse thing fall upon them; lest God should bring calamity upon their place and

⁴ Lev. xviii. 5.

⁵ Rom. i. 28.

nation, “the which whosoever heareth, his ears should tingle.”⁶

Stephen then reminds them of the advantages, “great every way,” which they had enjoyed, which yet had not availed to keep their hearts with God, or prevent their rebellion.

44. *Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness,*⁷ *as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.*⁸

45. *Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus*⁹ *into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David ;*

46. *Who found favour with God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.*¹

47. *But Solomon built him an house.*

48. *Howbeit, the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; as saith the prophet,*²

49. *Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool : what house will ye build me ? saith the Lord : or what is the place of my rest ?*

50. *Hath not my hand made all these things ?*

51. *Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did, so do ye.*

52. *Which of the prophets have not your fathers per-*

⁶ Jerem. xix. 4.

⁷ Or, “tent of the testimony,” as it is called, Numb. v. 15.

⁸ At even, there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire,” the witness or testimony of God’s presence with them.

⁹ Exodus xxvi. 30.

⁹ i. e. Joshua ; as Heb. iv. 8.

¹ 2 Sam. vii. 1—16.

² Isaiah lxvi. 1.

secuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

*53. Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.*²

So entirely is the history of the Jewish nation, a history of man's perverseness. They were a *stiff-necked* people, who would not bear the yoke. They were circumcised according to the letter; consecrated to God by the outward rite; but their heart was *uncircumcised*, not devoted to him; their ears were turned to the false prophets who corrupted his word. They had persecuted the men of God who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,"³ and *shewed before of the coming of the Just One*: whom now they had bribed Judas to betray, and urged Pilate to execute, and so filled up the measure of their iniquities. God had dealt with them, as he had dealt with no other nation. He had given them the law *by the disposition*, or ministration, of those spirits who "do his pleasure:"⁴ and these commands they had trampled under foot, and "done despite unto the Spirit of grace."

We see, in all this, the effects of that transgression which alienated man from God, and caused the natural heart to be at enmity against Him. Let it ever be remembered, that the rebuke which Stephen pronounces against the Jews, may not be

² So St. Paul speaks of the law as "ordained by angels," Gal. iii. 19: and Heb. ii. 2, "the word spoken by angels."

³ 2 Pet. i. 21.

⁴ Ps. ciii. 21.

deserved by the Jews alone. In order to *resist the Holy Ghost*, it is not necessary to ill-treat prophets, or put to death God's messengers. We resist the Holy Ghost, when we resist what the prophets have spoken: we "crucify the Son of God afresh," when we yield ourselves up to commit the sins for which he died. The Jews *received the law by the disposition of angels*: we have received it from Him to whom angels bow. And "if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."⁵

LECTURE XX.

DEATH OF STEPHEN.—A. D. 33.

ACTS vii. 54—60.

54. *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.*

55. *But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,*

56. *And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*

The Lord, then, whose cause Stephen was defending, does not desert his servants in the time

⁵ Heb. xii. 25.

of their need. Neither do his servants draw back in the moment of danger. Stephen plainly perceived what must now be the end of his bold and uncompromising rebuke. But this does not move him, and he finds support equal to his trial.

Such support is not confined to cases like that of Stephen. In more ordinary seasons it is enjoyed by the disciples of Christ. In the extremity of pain, in the bitterness of sorrow, in the crisis of death, many are permitted to receive such a foretaste of heaven, such an assurance of glory, as has conquered nature, and given the feelings of triumph in the midst of anguish. Stephen describes an actual vision. *Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.* This we do not expect: we “walk by faith, and not by sight:” but faith will be to us “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

The mention of Jesus and his glory enrages still more those who were disputing with Stephen.

57. *Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,*

58. *And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.¹*

¹ If Stephen had been fairly tried, and justly convicted, death by stoning was the punishment ordained in the law for blasphemy. Lev. xxiv. 16. “He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him.” And it is added, Deut. xvii. 7, “The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him

59. *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

60. *And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Such is the blessing of faith. Suddenly and unexpectedly is Stephen called to resign his life. But he is not found unprepared. He knows on whom to rely for the help he needed. His thoughts are such as these. "I am leaving this world, and entering another state. But I am not alone. My Saviour is with me. My soul is in his hands; to him I have committed it, for life and for death, for this world, and for that world to which I am going. And he is able to keep what I have committed to him; to save unto the uttermost. *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*"

Nothing here is vague or uncertain. Stephen knew on what he was trusting.² Not on a wild hope of God's mercy, to be shown him he knew not why: but on the clear assurance of Christ, "Whosoever liveth and believeth on me, shall never die." Therefore, with the confidence of one who had secured a ground to rest on, and who was sure that the ground was firm, he exclaims, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

But had one of Stephen's persecutors fallen suddenly down in the agonies of death, could he have uttered the same prayer, or uttering it, could he

to death, and afterwards the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you."

² See 2 Tim. vi. 12.

hope that it should be answered? Those who have shown no faith in Christ whilst living, can ill expect to be heard by him when dying. He has warned of them of this beforehand. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

Remember this, while yet there is time. So live, as you would desire to die.

The state of Stephen's heart towards his fellow men is as evident as the state of his heart towards his Saviour. *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.* Many who had heard the severe rebuke which he uttered, might be inclined to say, If this man had any regard for his brethren, he would not so bitterly inveigh against them. But his rebuke had proceeded from no want of love, but from an excess of love. He earnestly desired that they might be converted and live, and therefore he showed them how much they needed conversion. And now that he can do no more, he entreats mercy for them. *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*

This was the true christian spirit, learnt of Christ himself, who also had prayed for his own murderers, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”

Such is the frame of mind, which is prepared for a more perfect state, “where the wicked cease from troubling.” Of one who dies in this exercise

of faith and love, it may be truly said, as we read of Stephen, *he fell asleep*.

And here, in concluding the subject, it is impossible not to compare the Christian with the enemies of the Christian. See on the one side these angry, violent men, hating they knew not what, treating the object of their jealousy with gross injustice, proceeding from malice and enmity to cruelty and murder. On the other hand, see the disciple of Christ with the utmost meekness committing his cause to God : meeting their blind fury with sedate composure, and yielding up his soul to that Redeemer who had poured out his soul for him.

It cannot, I think, be doubted, which character our reason and our consciences approve, or in which state of heart we should desire to be found when summoned from this world. We should desire to have our lot with Stephen, and not with Stephen's enemies.

Now, his mind grew out of his faith. Zeal and love were his peculiar qualities. And zeal for God and love for man are the sure fruits of the Spirit upon the heart which is united to Christ Jesus through a true and lively faith.

Let the same faith be evidenced by the like fruits. Cherish the same zeal, exercise the same patience and charity ; and you may safely and composedly, like Stephen, resign your soul, saying, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*.

LECTURE XXI.

PERSECUTION DRIVES THE DISCIPLES FROM JERUSALEM INTO THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES. — A. D. 33.

ACTS viii. 1—4.

1. And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

It was not to be expected that they should spare the flock, who had already in so many cases attacked the shepherds. The first object of the chief priests and rulers must be to restrain the apostles. This had been tried. But now the persecution extended to those who followed them.

Looking onward to these difficulties, the Lord had given a general direction, “When they persecute you in this city, flee into another.”¹ The apostles themselves could not at present do so; it was needful for them, at all hazards, to remain at Jerusalem, and conduct the affairs of the church. But others were at liberty to seek safety in flight; and *were scattered abroad throughout all the regions*

¹ Matthew x. 23.

of Judea and Samaria. Thus the persecution, as we shall see, instead of crushing the infant church, tended to strengthen and enlarge it ; and added another to the numerous instances in which “ the wrath of man ” is made, under providential direction, to minister to the praise of God.

2. *And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*

3. *As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house ; and haling men and women committed them to prison.*

4. *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*

Thus God’s gracious purpose was promoted even by the enmity which persecuted these first believers. To whatever place or country they fled, where their connexions might be settled, or they might find a refuge among friends—wherever protection was offered them, they made a return of infinite value : they told the glad tidings of redemption ; they spoke of what God had done ; how he had remembered his people Israel, and fulfilled the promises which had kept them so long in expectation. And they would explain the evidence on which they had themselves received this truth ; the facts which confirmed it ; and how, rather than renounce the faith which they had embraced, and forfeit the peace which it had brought them, they had left their country, and their homes, and all that was dearest to them in the world, “ looking for a better country, an inheritance

eternal in the heavens.” *They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*

And this, not by a direct commission.² The apostles did not, as in other cases, set them apart for the work, and lay their hands upon them, and send them forth with fasting and prayer. Such a commission would not be given to the general body of believers. The influencing motive was in themselves ; in their own hearts. They had received the truth, the great truth, that “ God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself :” that as there is, on the one hand, “ no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus ;” so likewise, there is salvation in no other : “ for there is no other name under heaven given amongst men, whereby we must be saved.”

This truth they had themselves received ; and because they had received it, they were now scattered abroad, driven from their homes.

Though, therefore, they had no express commission, like the apostles ; they had feelings like the apostles ; like them, they “ could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard.” For they would find their friends, to whom they had come, in the very state from which they had been themselves so recently delivered : that state described by St. Paul, “ resting in the law,³ and making

² This evidently appears from the circumstances of the case, and is implied by the phrase used both here and in Acts xi. 20, *εὐαγγελίζόμενοι τὸν λόγον*, carrying the word of glad tidings. Hammond has an elaborate note to this effect.

³ Romans xi. 17, &c.

their boast of God, but through breaking the law dishonouring God :” “going about to establish their own righteousness, and ignorant of God’s righteousness :”[†] depending upon ordinances and ceremonies, which were merely a lifeless form ; with none of the temper and disposition which belongs to the kingdom of heaven : not poor in spirit : not pure in heart : not meek : not merciful : but proud, unholy, sensual, uncharitable. Such was the general character of the Jewish people, as it appears disclosed in the New Testament. Such, then, would be the character of those friends and connexions among whom the Christians had taken refuge, who were now *scattered abroad*. And surely there was great reason why they should *preach the word* among these, and tell them of that blood by which “all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses :” should tell them of that Spirit which is able to “turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just ;” and to renew them in righteousness and true holiness, “after the image of him that created them.”

Doubtless, they might have failed to do this. It is easier to go with the stream, and to suffer others to be carried down it, than to encounter and resist its force. And these might have followed the smoother path, and have allowed others to remain undisturbed in their errors, if the Spirit of God had not been strong within them, if the love of

[†] Romans x. 3.

Christ had not powerfully constrained them. But they were thus constrained ; and, therefore, they *went everywhere preaching the word* ; declaring, that God had visited his people ; had remembered his mercy, and fulfilled the promise made to Abraham ; that their eyes had seen his salvation.

It is, in fact, one of the divine properties of the christian faith, that it contains within itself a provision by which it is diffused and extended. Its seed is in itself. The Christian loves his Saviour, and therefore is zealous for his glory. That glory is promoted when his religion is extended ; therefore the Christian is zealous in extending it. The Christian also has an interest in all his fellow-creatures. These are benefited, inestimably benefited, when they are brought to the faith of Christ ; and, therefore, the Christian is anxious to bring them over to that faith.

And the same principle which led these first disciples to make known the tidings of the gospel, wherever they were scattered abroad, will operate in every disciple in every age and place. He will not be silent or unconcerned when those among whom he may be cast, in his family or in his neighbourhood, are ignorant or careless of truths, which have made him “wise unto salvation.” He will both desire and endeavour to lead others into ways, which he knows to be ways of “joy and peace :” and, still further, which he knows to be the only ways of safety to the soul.

LECTURE XXII.

THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED SUCCESSFULLY IN SAMARIA: AND IS RECEIVED BY THE MAGICIAN, SIMON.—A.D. 33.

Acts viii. 5—25.

5. *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.*¹

6. *And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.*

7. *For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.*

8. *And there was great joy in that city.*

9. *But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:*

10. *To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.*

11. *And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*

12. *But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*

¹ The apostles remained at Jerusalem. This, therefore, was not the apostle Philip, but the deacon.

13. *Then Simon himself believed also : and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.*

Simon was one of those impostors, who in all ages and countries have taken advantage of men's ignorance and credulity, and *bewitched them with sorceries*. They employ certain arts, perhaps they are acquainted with certain secrets of nature, formerly less understood than now ; and persuade the multitude that they possess more than human power. In this fraudulent vocation Simon was unusually successful. *They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.*

The arts, however, which he may have practised and the wonders he performed were very different from the miracles which attested the words of Philip. These astonished the people ; and they *believed him preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, and were baptized, both men and women.*

Simon himself believed also. He saw that a power belonged to Philip of which he knew nothing. He was aware of the hollowness of his own pretensions, and was more able than others to judge of the real power possessed by Philip. So he followed the rest, *and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.*

14. *Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John :*

15. *Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost :*

16. *For as yet he was fallen upon none of them ; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

17. *Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

Not all, probably, of those that had been baptized ; but some selected from the rest, who were to be employed in continuing the work which Philip had begun. Because the gift of the Spirit, here conferred, is not the sanctifying influence promised by Peter, (Acts ii. 38,) to all who should “repent, and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.” It appears from what follows, that the gifts now received were the extraordinary powers which the apostles possessed, and had the privilege of communicating to such as they saw fitted for the purpose of extending the kingdom of Christ. Such powers as are described in Acts xix. 6, “When Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them ; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.”

The sight of this power awakened in the mind of Simon recollections of a trade which he ought to have forgotten.

18. *And when Simon saw, that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,*

19. *Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*

20. *But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.*

21. *Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter : for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.*

22. *Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*

23. *For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*

24. *Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*

25. *And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.*

We were told that *Simon himself believed*. He could not avoid believing that a power was with Philip which does not belong to man. But such belief was very different from that faith which converts the heart. His mind was still set upon this present world ; and a great temptation was before him. He, perhaps, had formerly been used to communicate the secrets of his magic for a certain price ; and the thought still haunted him, that all things might be turned to gain.

That, however, which to him was everything, was to the apostles nothing. They had few affections left for things below, even lawful things : much less could Simon's unlawful offer have any temptation for them. But it opened to them the state of his heart, and enabled them to disclose it to himself. *Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter.*

³ “ Know ye not, that so many of us as were

³ Rom. vi. 3. Gal. vi. 14. Rom. vi. 11.

baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death," being "crucified to the world," and dead to sin? *Thou hast neither part nor lot in him*, if thine heart is still set on this world, enslaved to this world: alive to it and its gain, but not to God and his righteousness. Nay, the bond of thine iniquity is more strongly rivetted than ever, inasmuch as the things which might have been for thy deliverance, have become unto thee an occasion of falling.

We might hope, from Simon's reply, that conscience was not extinguished in his heart. *Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.* But we should gladly have found him lamenting his sin, as well as dreading its consequences. And the traditions of ancient history lead us to fear that he did not repent, with any real change of heart, of *this his wickedness*; that he went on from bad to worse, and the bond of his iniquity was never broken. He had desired to employ for his own purposes, for profit and honour to himself, those gifts of the Spirit which were bestowed for the advancement of God's glory, and the salvation of men. And he leaves an awful example to those especially who are engaged in sacred duties, that they guard against any selfish principle, any unholy motive, which might mix itself with their ministrations. For this is guilt of the same species, if not of the same heinousness, as Simon's. And under such a reflection, what need have all to pray that the

thoughts of their hearts may be forgiven ; that the Lord may pardon the sins of his people, and mercifully look upon their infirmities.

LECTURE XXIII.

CONVERSION AND BAPTISM OF A PROSELYTE FROM ETHIOPIA.—A. D. 34.

Acts viii. 26—40.

26. *And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.*

27. *And he arose and went : and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,*

28. *Was returning, and sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet.*

29. *Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.*

This is a beautiful example of the watchful providence of God, waiting to be gracious : waiting to bestow fresh gifts at the proper season. It explains the text which says, “To him that hath shall be given.” For here is set before us a person who, though living in a distant and heathen country, though charged with authority and duty there, still left all at the appointed time, and came up to

Jerusalem, to worship the God whom he had learnt to serve.¹ The state of his heart may be perceived from his employment : as he travelled, he was engaged in reading the prophet Isaiah.

Perhaps at Jerusalem he had heard the things which had come to pass ; perhaps he had been directed, through some of those who were preaching the gospel there, and proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah, to the prophecies which especially related to him. And he did not disregard what he heard. His heart had been already turned to God : he had not closed his eyes against the light which had shone upon him, and he was now seeking fresh light from prophecy, and waiting till “the day-star should arise,”² and enable him to perceive its full meaning.

To accomplish this end, Philip is first sent by an angel of the Lord to the desert which lay between Jerusalem and Gaza : and now *the Spirit said, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.*

30. *And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest ?*

31. *And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me ? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.*

¹ It is made a question, whether this “man of Ethiopia,” (*i.e.* probably, Abyssinia) were a heathen proselyte, or of Jewish extraction. Nothing would make us suppose the latter, except that, if by birth a heathen, this was the first *Gentile* convert : and it is not mentioned that he was so.

² 2 Peter i. 19.

32. *The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:*³

33. *In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.*

34. *And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?*

35. *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*

36. *And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*

37. *Then Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

It was an easy task for Philip to show how the prophecy to which the Ethiopian had been directed was accurately fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus, and of no *other man*.

The “good ground,” so softened and prepared, the “honest and good heart,” received the seed of truth. He said, *See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*

We were very lately reading how Simon, a man of a different stamp, as soon as he perceived an opportunity of gain, seized it eagerly; and offered money for what he thought would prove money’s worth to him. So it is with all who are keen after any earthly good: they lose no opportunity, they suffer no delay. This quickness and eagerness is not extinguished, but transferred to a better object,

³ Isaiah liii.

when spiritual things take possession of the mind. There must be no delay. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”⁴ So it was with this stranger. He felt within himself: If we know not what a day may bring forth, and if “there is but one name under heaven given among men, whereby we may be saved,” I must be inscribed with that name. I must receive that blessing whilst I can; and secure for myself the treasure which is laid up in Christ. *What doth hinder me to be baptized*, since that is the gate of his mercy: the entrance into the everlasting covenant? Let me at once put off the old man, which is “corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”⁵

Such would be his thoughts. Philip encourages them, throws no obstacle in the way of his desire; and only insists on the condition, without which baptism would be a vain and empty form. *If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.*

Simon had not believed with all his heart, and had “no part nor lot in the matter,” though the rite of baptism had been solemnised. If the Ethiopian did believe; so believe that *Jesus Christ is the Son of God*, as to trust in him for all that the soul can need, or God sees fit to bestow; then he had part in this salvation. The blood of Christ should “wash away his sins,” as water cleanseth the defilement

⁴ Matt. xiii. 44.

⁵ See Eph. iv. 22—24.

of the body : nay, there should be in him “ a well of water, springing up into everlasting life : ” ⁶ he should “ receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,” ⁷ to comfort, and strengthen, and purify his mind.

38. *And he commanded the chariot to stand still : and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch ; and he baptized him.*

39. *And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more : and he went on his way rejoicing.*

40. *But Philip was found at Azotus : and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.*

We can easily conceive that this man would *go on his way rejoicing*. We can understand his feelings, and enter into the state of his mind. We know that he was acquainted with the scripture ; which had brought him to perceive his condition in the world, as the creature of a pure and holy God. He must often have felt within himself a doubtful and anxious apprehension, as to his state in the sight of that God. The scripture told him what God required : but he knew likewise his own heart and practice ; and he could not but see in how many things he had offended, and “ come short of the glory of God.” Like a mariner on a stormy sea, in a sinking vessel, he would be full of doubts and fears. Now came certainty instead of doubt, and hope instead of fear. He had found an anchor for his soul, fixed it upon Christ, the rock of ages. He had received a proof, a proof not to

⁶ John iv. 14.

⁷ Acts ii. 38.

be disputed, of God's "good-will towards 'men ;" his love and pity for the creatures he had made. Nay, he had received for himself a token of that love, and was enrolled as one of his adopted children. So he *went on his way rejoicing*. A wanderer on the earth, he had been led into a safe and certain path. A creature of God, he had found assurance of his favour. A sinful being, he had found a remedy for his sin: a dying creature, he had found "life and immortality."

It would not be all joy with him, as he passed onward in his course. He would have, like other men, his troubles; like other Christians, he would have his trials; but for the future there was hope, and for the present there was joy; "joy and peace in believing."

LECTURE XXIV.

SAUL, JOURNEYING TO DAMASCUS, IS ARRESTED
BY A VISION FROM HEAVEN.—A. D. 35.

ACTS ix. 1—9.

1. *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,*

2. *And desired of him letters to Damascus¹ to the syna-*

¹ Damascus was the chief city of Syria: and distant five or six days' journey from Jerusalem.

gogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

We heard of Saul in the last chapter, as “consenting unto the death” of Stephen. He speaks of this afterwards himself, when describing his former state of mind. “I verily (xxvi. 9) thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which things I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.” For he had been “brought up at the feet of Gamaliel:” “taught according to the most perfect manner of the law of the fathers,” and, “according to the most straitest sect of their religion, had lived a Pharisee.”² Therefore being “zealous towards God,” he “punished in every synagogue” those who confessed their faith in Christ, and “compelled them to blaspheme.”³

In all this, as our Lord had foretold, he supposed that he was doing God service:⁴ was doing what his religion required of him. Without much inquiry, he judged that whatever opposed the opinion and practice of his forefathers, must be wrong: and being of an ardent, zealous mind, he hotly persecuted those whom he looked upon as enemies of what he himself was following.

That he did this in ignorance and unbelief,⁵ he

² Ch. xxii. 3; xxvi. 5.

³ Ch. xxii. 11.

⁴ See John xvi. 2.

⁵ 1 Tim. i. 13.

afterwards acquaints us. But did he excuse himself, because he was zealous, though ignorant, and sincere, though unbelieving? Far from it. He frequently abases himself as “the chief of sinners,” because he “persecuted the church of God.” He felt that his ignorance and his unbelief, were his sins: the sins of which he had need to repent, and did repent: because he was ignorant for want of inquiry, and unbelieving through prejudice and obstinacy.

He has left us an instructive example, to examine before we condemn: to be jealous of our own hearts: not to take for granted that nothing can be wrong which we imagine to be right, nothing right which we imagine to be wrong. Many have been fatally deceived, while pursuing what they held to be the good old way.

Doubtless, the heart, the conscience, the understanding, must determine our conduct. They are given us for that purpose. But the heart must be guided, for it is “deceitful above all things:” the conscience must be instructed according to God’s law: the understanding directed by his grace: lest “ignorantly and in unbelief,” but still to our eternal ruin, we “put darkness for light, and light for darkness.”

Saul did this, whilst *breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*, he set out for Damascus, a city where great numbers of Jews were resident,⁶ and many had been con-

⁶ Damascus, in the reign of Nero, contained so many Jews, that ten thousand were slain at once in a quarrel with the other inhabitants.

verted to the faith. These were now threatened with a heavy storm; when it pleased God in a most unexpected manner to disperse the cloud, and give them joy for heaviness.

3. *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:*

4. *And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

5. *And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.⁷*

6. *And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*

7. *And the men which journeyed with him, stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*

Saul had been as an animal unsubdued to the yoke, and contending against his master: *kicking against the pricks*, or goad, which urged him. This was a conflict in which he must fail at last. Yet the voice which warned him to desist, was rather a gentle than an angry voice; not so much of just indignation, as of kind remonstrance. *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Why persecutest thou Him, who came to bless thee: came that thou mightest have life, and have it more abundantly? Instead of contending against that which thou canst

⁷ A proverbial expression. (See Eurip. Bacch. v. 794; and Pind. Ode 2.) The unbroken bullock kicks against the driver's goad.

never overcome, “take my yoke upon thee, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly of heart; and thou shalt find rest unto thy soul.”

8. *And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*

9. *And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

Such was the effect of what had taken place, both upon his body and his mind. His outward sight was closed. But his inward sight had received new strength and vigour. We are told, afterwards, how he was employed. “Behold, he prayeth.” He was engaged, then, these three days, in turning the eye of his mind towards himself, with “mourning, and fasting, and prayer.” The Spirit was “reproving him of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:” and laying the foundation of a life to be hereafter spent in faith, and not in unbelief; in the true service of God, and in zeal “according to knowledge.”

The event shows that what had happened to him was nothing in the common course of nature. A storm, or a stroke of lightning, might take away the senses for a time: might benumb the vital powers. But when the man recovered, he would be the same man: think, and judge, and act, as he had acted and judged before. Saul, when his bodily strength was restored, was no longer the same man. A change was effected in his heart, which can be effected by God alone. He was still

zealous ; but his zeal was not to destroy men's lives, but to save them. He was still sincere and active, but not presumptuous or rash : he humbly asks, *Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do ?* What is thy will, in the employment of my talents, means, and opportunities ?

Thus it is, according to the parable : (Luke xi. 21 :) “ When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace.” Satan, unknown to Saul, was in fact the master whom he was serving ; was, as a strong man, forcing him to use his powers to destroy the christian faith. And his goods were in peace. Saul then had no compunctious feelings : never perceived that he was the slave of Satan, and the adversary of God. But now it had happened, according to the conclusion of the parable. “ When a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all the armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.” Saul had been wrested out of the power of Satan : and the conqueror would turn to his own use “ the spoils :” would employ in his service the faculties which Saul so eminently possessed ; the vigorous understanding, the acquired knowledge, the active zeal, and the unwearied energy. He would habitually and constantly ask the question, which here he asks in reference to the occasion, *Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do ?* How can I best serve thee, with the faculties, the influence, the opportunities which thou hast given ?

LECTURE XXV.

ANANIAS BY A VISION IS COMMISSIONED TO SEEK OUT SAUL, WHO IS BAPTIZED, AND BECOMES A PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL. —A. D. 35.

ACTS ix. 10—22.

10. *And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.*

11. *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,*

12. *And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.*

13. *Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:*

14. *And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.*

15. *But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:*

16. *For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*

The thoughts expressed by Ananias were natural, and he is not condemned for indulging them. He

could only judge of Saul from what he knew concerning him : and he could not think well of a man who had *done much evil to the saints* :—was an enemy to those whom the Spirit had sanctified, and made “a holy people” to the Lord.

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way ; for he is a chosen vessel unto me. I have selected him to be an instrument in my hands : I have “separated”¹ him from ordinary vessels, as a vessel for my peculiar use ; and “called him by my grace,” *that he may bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.*

It is not our business to inquire why God saw fit to make Saul a *chosen vessel* for his service, and to bring him into his service by extraordinary means. “His ways are far above out of our sight.” But though we cannot always perceive his reasons, we are quite sure that he has reasons. Ignorant or perverse men may act without reason ; but it is impossible that God should do so. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?”

In the usual course of God’s dealings with man, his grace does not enlighten those who are acting as Saul was acting : giving way to perverseness, obstinacy, and malicious passions. His ordinary and sure mode of dealing is : “They that seek me, shall find me.” “The meek will he guide in judgment.”

But in every age he has been known to snatch some from the midst of sin, as “brands from the burning ;” thus showing, that none need despair ;

¹ See Gal. i. 15.

that repentance is open to the worst ; that “ the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin ;” and that the power of the Holy Spirit is such as to soften the most stony heart. Paul himself was of opinion that this was the purpose of God’s mercy to him. (1 Tim. i. 16.) “ Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting.”

And wherever the gospel has been preached, this example of the favour of God shown to one who had before been “ a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious,” has proved a comfort to the repentant sinner. It is calculated to give comfort to any one, who may remember former wickedness with anguish of soul. He has here an instance of one like himself, to whom “ Christ Jesus did show forth his long-suffering :” that is, whom he received and pardoned. The same merciful Lord has still the same will and the same power to save all who come to him in the spirit of Saul, humbly inquiring, “ Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do ?” He “ will in no wise cast them out.” He “ will show them of his covenant.” He “ will guide them with his counsel ;” he will hereafter “ receive them in glory.”

We return to Ananias.

17. *And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house ; and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.*

18. *And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.*

19. *And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.*

20. *And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*

21. *But all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?*

22. *But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.*

The natural sight of Saul had been taken away for a time; and when it was restored, *there fell from his eyes as it had been scales*. This, surely, was an emblem of his mind. He says himself, (2 Cor. iv. 4,) “The god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not.” It had been his own state. His mind was blinded, that “seeing he did not perceive, and hearing he did not understand.” But, now, “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, had shined in his heart:” *and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God: and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.*

This truth had been revealed to him at once: as when God had said at the creation, “Let there be light; and there was light.” In the ordinary course, the conviction would be more gradual. He

would have examined into the life and death, the ministry and doctrines, of Jesus: he would have compared them with the scriptures; with the history of his nation; with Moses and the law; and more especially with the prophecies concerning him who was to come. Thus, under the teaching of the Spirit, he would arrive by gradual steps at the truth, that *this is very Christ*, and that this who was the Christ, was also *the Son of God*.

But such a mode of conviction would require time. Still more would it require time, that the truth should take such hold upon his heart as to enlist it in the cause, and devote him henceforward to the gospel.

Here, however, was no such delay. *Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues*. And he himself explains it: telling us, that “it pleased God to reveal his Son in him:”² that “the mystery was made known to him by revelation:”³ that the truths which he declared he “received of the Lord,” not by intercourse with his fellow-men.⁴

This enabled him more fully in his after-life to magnify, as he did, the power of divine grace, which had made him what he was. This led him to declare, with the energy which he was constantly employing, that the gospel comes “not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;”⁵ that Christ is “the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”⁶ Expe-

² Gal. i. 16.

³ Eph. iii. 3.

⁴ 1 Cor. xi. 23.

⁵ 1 Thess. i. 5.

⁶ 1 Cor. i. 24.

rience enabled him to raise an expectation of this in others, with a force which can be derived from experience alone. Speaking that which he knew, and testifying what he himself had felt, striving according to the divine “working which wrought within him mightily,”⁸ *he confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.*

LECTURE XXVI.

SAUL VISITS JERUSALEM, AND IS SENT FROM THENCE TO TARSUS. THE CHURCHES ARE LEFT IN PEACE.—A. D. 38.

Acts ix. 23—31.

23. *And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him :*¹

⁸ Col. i. 29.

¹ The *many days* here spoken of, seem to have been chiefly spent by Saul in Arabia. He says distinctly in writing to the Galatians, (i. 17,) that after the revelation made to him, he “went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then *after three years* I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.” These *three years*, must be taken from the date of his conversion, not of his return to Damascus. Otherwise, as Professor Burton has observed, it is impossible to understand how his presence at Jerusalem should have caused so much apprehension. Had he been during those *many days*,

24. *But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him.*

25. *Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.*

26. *And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples : but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.*

27. *But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*

28. *And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.*

29. *And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians : but they went about to slay him.*

30. *Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.*

This was the apparent cause of Saul's departure from Jerusalem. But it was only the method by which the will of God was brought to pass. Saul was not intended to remain at Jerusalem, or ordained to preach the gospel to the Jews. We learn elsewhere (ch. xxii. 17,) that while he was praying in the temple, the Lord appeared in a vision to him, saying, "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem : for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee : and when the

i. e. three whole years, preaching at Damascus, it must have been known to the disciples at Jerusalem.—*Burton, Lect. iii. ad. fin.*

blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.”

Saul would have excused the violence of his countrymen, who were the more indignant against him because he had left their party, and was now promoting the faith which before he destroyed. But the Lord, whose servant he had become, designed him for other duties: to be prepared for which he was now sent forth to his native city, Tarsus.

31. *Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*

The *churches had rest*. The various companies of persons throughout the land who had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and were united in worshipping God as his disciples: these were left for a while in peace.

If we can suppose that there were in this our country, enemies of the faith of Christ: not only secret enemies, but men who had both activity and power to harass and vex all that professed it: to arrest the preachers or the hearers of the gospel, and treat them at their will: then we have the description of that state in which the Christians of Judea had been before placed. Such was the “havoc of the church” which Saul himself had

made ; when “entering into every house, and haling men and women, he committed them to prison.”

On a sudden, one principal mover in these persecutions is restrained ; men’s passions are not roused into violence ; their minds are allowed to return to the ordinary concerns of life ; one party ceases to disturb, and the other is able to pursue its own course in quietness. Such was the change here described, when *the churches had rest*. And they *were edified*. Their trials had proved and confirmed their faith : but their rest would promote their edification. They were enabled to give themselves more earnestly “to the word of God, and to prayer.” They could meet without fear, they could encourage one another, instruct one another. They had “suffered for a while,” which gave evidence of sincerity ; now they might be “stablished, strengthened, settled.”²

² Though no mention is here made of the manner in which these churches were superintended, it is evident that there must have been some superintendence. There must have been some to “teach, and rebuke, and exhort.” “The apostles could not be always present : and it seems most probable that a ministry resembling that of the seven deacons was established in every place where there were believers.” By degrees the want of an individual to superintend the whole would be experienced : and this “was the natural and almost necessary origin of a new office being established in the church, that of presbyters or elders.” For a while, the apostles served as such : but when the churches were multiplied, they could not everywhere be consulted, and they appointed a local or stationary presbyter to act in their stead. This first appointment is not related : but it

They are beautifully represented as *walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*. In the fear of the Lord, as studying his word, seeking his guidance, and afraid of declining to the right hand or the left. Such fear of the Lord is "the beginning of wisdom," and the summit of "understanding." And it has nothing in it of distress or alarm. It is not fear of that nature which "hath torment."³ There is nothing in reverential awe which is inconsistent with peace and love. The child has no dread of a good parent, while attentive to that parent's instructions. And that reverence of an heavenly Father, which makes us sober, and vigilant, and circumspect, instead of disturbing the quiet of the soul, is productive of the best and surest peace which this world can ever give. So we read here; *the churches walking in the fear of God, walked also in the comfort of the Holy Ghost*. They experienced the fulfilment of their Lord's promise: "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."⁴ These loved their Lord and Saviour: they had shown it, by the persecutions which they had borne; they kept his words, and were walking in his fear; and now they enjoyed in their hearts the presence of the Father and the Son, brought home to them by the Holy Ghost the Comforter.

must have taken place before the year 43 or 44, as appears by Acts xi. 30.—See *Burton, Lect. on Eccl. Hist.* l. iv. p. 95. &c.

³ 1 John iv. 18.

⁴ John xiv. 23.

“Blessed are they that hear the joyful sound. They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.”⁵

We are not surprised when it is added, that the churches *were multiplied*. Men would be struck by what they saw. They saw large companies of persons living in a manner which the conscience of man, even of fallen man, approves: “abhorring that which is evil, cleaving to that which is good: kindly affectioned one towards another with brotherly love: in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord: rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.”⁶ Seeing this “good conversation,” they would inquire into the source from whence it proceeded, the motives by which it was sustained. And then they would be led to him, in whom “it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell,”⁷ as in a treasury from which men might seek it: who “when he had ascended up on high, received gifts for men, even for his enemies, that the Lord God might dwell amongst them.”⁸

Let all Christians so live, as to be thus witnesses in the cause of the Lord “who bought them.” So others may be brought to the same faith, being won by the heavenly conversation which they behold,⁹ directed by *the fear of the Lord*, and cheered by *the comfort of the Holy Ghost*.

⁵ Ps. lxxxix. 15.

⁶ Rom. xii. 9, &c.

⁷ Col. i. 19.

⁸ Ps. lxviii. 18. Eph. iv. 8.

⁹ 1 Pet. iii. 1.

LECTURE XXVII.

ÆNEAS IS HEALED BY PETER, AND DORCAS RESTORED TO LIFE. CHARACTER OF DORCAS.

—A. D. 39.

ACTS ix. 32—43.

32. *And it came to pass, as Peter passed through all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.¹*

33. *And there he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.*

34. *And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.*

35. *And all that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.*

In performing this miracle, the apostle uses words which exactly describe the purpose and the power of the Lord, whose messenger he was. *Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.* Christ came to those who were as much oppressed by sin, as Æneas by disease. As the prophet expresses it, “the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint.” Out of this hopeless state he

¹ A town on the coast, about forty miles from Jerusalem, and ten from Joppa.

came to raise them : to recover them of their infirmity. The promise is clear ; and says, “ I give unto them eternal life ; and no man shall pluck them out of my hand.” “ My grace is sufficient for them.” “ Sin shall have no more dominion over them.” And as the promise is clear, so is the corresponding duty. “ Arise ; arise immediately ; set your affections on things above ; and let others see your good works,” if peradventure they too may *turn unto the Lord*, unto him who hath given such grace to men.

36. *Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas : this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.*

37. *And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died : whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.*

38. *And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.*

39. *Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber : and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.*

40. *But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed ; and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes : and when she saw Peter, she sat up.*

41. *And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.*

42. *And it was known throughout all Joppa ; and many believed in the Lord.*

43. *And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa, with one Simon a tanner.*

It is a pleasing account which is here given of Dorcas : of the *good works and alms-deeds* which she did, and of the mutual affection which subsisted between her, and those to whom she had been kind.

We see at once that a change had been wrought upon her heart. The way in which she employed herself, is not the ordinary mode of living. It is not that mode of living, to which the disposition naturally inclines us. The natural mode of living is that of self-indulgence, self-advancement. Men employ their wealth, their time, their thoughts, on themselves, and not on others ; on some self-gratification or personal object, and not on increasing the comforts of those who need them. The wants, the privations, the sorrows of those around us may be as much forgotten and left out of view, as if they were not heirs of the same nature, creatures of the same God.

Here a different character is described. Dorcas had employed herself in improving the condition of those who had fewer comforts than she enjoyed ; and now that she was taken away, the widows and destitute persons stood by weeping, and lamenting the loss which they had sustained.

The reason of Dorcas's conduct is explained, when we are told, that she was a *disciple*. She had received into her heart those truths, which led her,

not having other duties, to employ herself in benefiting her neighbours. — She was a disciple of Christ, who had loved her and given himself for her. Her first thought would be, how she could frame her life in a manner pleasing to him, to whom she owed even her own soul. And in many ways he has told us how he is pleased. He is pleased when those who have this world's good, are “ready to distribute, and glad to communicate” it to others. He is pleased when his people “do good unto all men, especially to such as are of the household of faith:” when they clothe the naked, feed the hungry, relieve the stranger, comfort the sick, visit the prisoner. He considers these things as done unto himself. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Such was the Saviour's will, and she must comply with it. Even if command had been silent, she would still, as Christ's disciple, be actuated by feelings which would lead to the same conduct. Her fellow-creatures had acquired a new value in her eyes. They were no longer seen merely as persons born into the same world with herself, who might be convenient to her, and promote her comfort, or increase the general wealth of the community. They were those for whom, as for herself, “Christ died.” This gave her an interest in them: an interest in their temporal and in their spiritual welfare: and she would assist both, as God might give her power and opportunity. We find it mentioned universally as the result of faith

in Christ. Believers were stirred up to “love and good works,” and were “not barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus.” That knowledge would supersede many worldly trifles which would otherwise occupy the mind and engross the time : but it would not leave the mind unoccupied, or the time unemployed. There will always be things which may be done, and may be usefully done, which will not suffer the Christian to be idle. There will always be the young who may be watched over, the ignorant who may be instructed, the sorrowful who may be comforted, the destitute who may be relieved.

God shows his approval of this conduct, by the blessings which attend it ; the inward comfort by which it is rewarded. It gives an interest to daily and ordinary life : it gives a value and importance to every passing day. And comfort it gives, too, in that hour to which Dorcas seemed to have come, and to which all must come : comfort from the evidence of faith which such a life attests. It proves that our faith, as Christians, has not been a barren creed, a lifeless profession, but an active principle in the soul : that the habits have been formed by it, the practice in agreement with it. We need, in that trying hour, a testimony that our religion has been real and true religion. And “true religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world.”^c

^c James i. 27.

LECTURE XXVIII.

A REVELATION IS MADE TO CORNELIUS. HIS CHARACTER. A VISION ALSO SEEN BY PETER.
—A. D. 41.

ACTS x. 1—16.

1. *There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,*

2. *A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

3. *He saw in a vision evidently, about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.¹*

4. *And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

5. *And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:*

6. *He togeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.*

¹ There are no certain means of knowing the exact time when this event took place. Ancient authorities fix it at about two years from our Lord's ascension. Burton earlier: on the general ground of the improbability of the "call of the Gentiles" being so long protracted. This argument still more strongly opposes the common chronology of our Bible, which dates it as late as the year 41.

7. *And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually ;*

8. *And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.*²

Hitherto the gospel had been preached to the Jewish people only. No others had been taught or invited to become disciples of Christ. His faith had been proclaimed in many countries beyond Judea ; but only in the synagogues of the Jews who were settled in those lands. Such had been the design : “ To the Jew first, and afterwards to the Gentile.”³ The messengers (Luke xv. 21) who were sent to call the guests, and invite them to the banquet prepared, were first to visit the streets and lanes of the city, before they went out “ into the highways and hedges,” and compelled the strangers and wanderers to come in.

The time was now arrived when he who had appeared, that he might be “ the glory of his people Israel,” should be “ a light to lighten the Gentiles,” also. But to explain this, and to convince the apostles that such was the design of God, an express command was needed : a fresh revelation. There were prophecies direct and clear ; but this plain meaning was hidden from the minds of those who read them. Such strong hold do the opinions of our country, the prejudices of our neighbourhood, the traditions of our fathers, possess over us. These are believed and followed, even in contra-

² Cæsarea was about a day’s journey to the north of Joppa.

³ Romans xi. 9.

diction to what we ought first to be ruled by. The Jews boasted of Moses ; yet could not see that he bore witness that Jesus was the Christ. They thought that in the scriptures they had eternal life ; yet could not perceive that these “ testified of Jesus.” ⁴ And so, now, a special revelation was needed to prove that the people which “ walked in darkness,” were to “ see great light :” that “ the Gentiles should come to the light” of the Sun of righteousness, and “ kings to the brightness of his rising.” ⁵

This revelation was made in the first place to Cornelius, himself a Gentile, an officer in the Roman army.

Supposing that any earthly sovereign had among his subjects a tribe which was held in light esteem, and that he desired to raise that tribe in the opinion of his people : he might promote his purpose by calling one of them into his service ; distinguishing him by some particular token of favour, some unusual notice. Such was the method which God was pleased to follow in this case. He sent his angel, not to Peter, not to Barnabas, not to any one of the apostles, nor even of the Jews ; but to a Gentile, a Roman soldier, *a centurion of the band called the Italian band.*

Still we must observe, that though a Gentile, he was not a man whom the grace of God visited now for the first time. In the divine providence, he had been sent into a land where the Jewish scriptures were known ; where many of the inhabitants,

⁴ John v. 39.

⁵ Isaiah ix. 2 ; lx. 3.

being Jews, were worshippers of the true God, and separated from the idolatrous practices which prevailed around them. Cornelius had not despised this foreign tribe, this superstitious brotherhood, as their heathen neighbours termed the Jews: he had opened his eyes to the truths declared by Moses and the prophets; had become *a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway*.⁶

Such was the man whom God selected as an instrument to make his will known: to show to Peter, by an evident example, that the veil was now to be removed which had hitherto excluded Gentiles from the knowledge of God and his righteousness. God had accepted *his prayers and his alms*: he was “not far from the kingdom of God:” and now that kingdom should be opened to him in all its glory.

In obedience to the heavenly vision, Cornelius sends his men to Joppa. Meanwhile, at Joppa, God was preparing that they should be received.

9. *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour:*

⁶He is an example of that class of proselytes who are called proselytes of the gate; who adopted the Hebrew belief, without conforming to the Mosaic law. Therefore, though a worshipper of the true God, he was a Gentile in the eye of the Jews. He was “of the uncircumcision.” See on this point Mede, Disc. iii.

10. *And he became very hungry, and would have eaten : but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,*

11. *And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth :*

12. *Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*

13. *And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter ; kill, and eat.*

14. *But Peter said, Not so, Lord ; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*

15. *And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

16. *This was done thrice : and the vessel was received up again into heaven.*

It was part of the law of Moses to distinguish certain animals which might be used for food from others which were forbidden. In the eleventh chapter of Leviticus these are enumerated at length. Moses there says, “These are the beasts which thou shalt eat. Others shall be an abomination unto you ; their carcases shall ye not touch ; they are unclean unto you.”

Such differences as to food lawful and unlawful make a practical separation between people and nation. This, doubtless, was one chief intention of that law, which laid down distinctions between the clean and the unclean animal. It restrained the intercourse of the Israelites with other nations.

Now, however, this separation was to be at an end. “All flesh should see the salvation of

God.” There was to be “neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision, nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free : but Christ all, and in all.”⁷ And this was signified to Peter in the vision which he saw. God had now *cleansed* the Gentiles. No man should be reckoned so *common or unclean* but he might “arise, and wash away his sins, being baptized in the name of the Lord.” The parable was to be accomplished ; and the messengers of the Lord were to go out not only into “the streets and lanes of the city,” but into the “highways and hedges,” that the Lord’s house might be filled.

Here also is an emblem of the grace which Christ bestows. It leaves nothing *common or unclean*. They who would have seemed farthest removed from the divine favour, in nature, in habit, in character, being “renewed in the spirit of their mind,” become “new creatures,” are received at the king’s table, and enabled to “sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.”

⁷ Col. iii. 11.

LECTURE XXIX.

PETER ACCOMPANIES THE MESSENGERS OF CORNELIUS, AND FINDS HIM WITH HIS FRIENDS, EXPECTING HIS ARRIVAL.—A. D. 41.

ACTS x. 17—33.

17. *Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,*

18. *And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.*

19. *While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.*

20. *Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing : for I have sent them.*

St. Luke, in writing this, sets before us the providential care of God watching over his people, and ordering those events which are to bring about his purposes respecting them. This is done here by actual visions and revelations. An angel is sent to Cornelius. A vision is shown to Peter : and while he *thinks on the vision*, and *doubts what it should mean*, the Spirit instructs him in the will of God. It was a period of extraordinary interposition on the part of God. But without the angel who may be really heard, and without the vision which may be plainly seen, God will always

find means that they shall know his will, who, like Cornelius and Simon, have hearts prepared to follow it. “What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.”¹

21. *Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?*

22. *And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.*

23. *Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.*

24. *And the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.*

25. *And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.*

26. *But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.*

27. *And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.*

28. *And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*

29. *Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?*

30. *And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my*

¹ Psalm xxv. 12.

house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

31. *And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.*

32. *Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter ; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side : who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.*

33. *Immediately therefore I sent to thee ; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

A revelation, which he knew to have come from God, had directed Cornelius to expect from Peter instructions of infinite importance. And Cornelius here describes the state of mind in which he and his party were waiting for these instructions. *Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.* And, if we consider, it is the very frame of mind in which we ought to be ourselves found at this moment : the frame in which we should always receive God's word, whether written in the scripture, or declared in the public ministrations of the church. It implies reverence, attention, expectation.

1. It implies, first, REVERENCE. And the Bible has a claim to reverence. It is as direct a communication from God, as the message of Peter to Cornelius. We should not study the scripture, if we did not believe this. We open it with the same impression as that which influenced Cornelius and his friends. They would not have been to-

gether, if they had not believed that God had summoned them. Nor should we be reading the scripture, unless we believed that God had revealed it for our instruction. Peter was listened to, that he might “tell words by which Cornelius and all his house should be saved.”² The scripture is listened to for the same reason. It is “able to make us wise unto salvation.”³ Cornelius and his party would have acted most unreasonably, if after assembling with so much preparation, they had turned away from Peter’s doctrine, and said, This is not what we expected to hear, nor will we listen to it. The Christian is equally unreasonable unless he receives the Bible, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God :⁴ unless he receives it with submission, even though it condemns him ; with reverence, even if it surprises him. Cornelius, we shall see, did not suffer himself to cavil or dispute. As he had prepared himself *to hear all the things commanded of God*, so he did unhesitatingly receive them. And although they were new and unexpected, and different from all his previous views, he yielded ready obedience, and acted on the just sentiment, “What am I that I should reply against God?”

2. Another feeling expressed in the words of Cornelius is ATTENTION. *We are all here present, to hear the things commanded thee.*

There is great meaning in that phrase of scrip-

² Ch. xi. 34.

³ 2 Tim. iii. 15.

⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

ture, “the hearing ear.” For all ears are not hearing ears. Many have been present year after year, when scripture has been read and expounded, who cannot be said to have ever *heard* at all. They are present in body, but absent in mind. The minister, when he visits the beds of the dying, often has the opportunity of seeing this. He perceives the earnest interest, the anxious inquiry, the impatience to understand. He is astonished, perhaps, at the difference—no listlessness—no weariness. And if he were to ask the reason, he would be told,—I feel the importance now, of all you say : I wish to understand : I cannot dispense with the instruction, which before I undervalued and neglected. And now, perhaps, for the first time, the hearer receives the word as applying to himself ; as being his own immediate and personal concern. This is what I am to believe. This is what I am to repent of having done. This is what I am to resolve on doing. This is the command which God has issued to direct me. Such are his feelings now : and the more plainly the word is spoken, or the more closely it touches him, the better he is satisfied, because he is then most profited, and makes most progress in what he is really desirous to attain.

3. There is still another feeling which ought not to be left without notice : that of EXPECTATION. The language of Cornelius is the language of expectation. *Now we are all here present before God, to hear all the things that are commanded thee of*

God. And in this spirit should we enter the sanctuary, and attend upon all religious ordinances. Though we are always in God's presence, though he is about our paths, and spieth out all our ways; yet are we more especially and more solemnly present before him, when assembled in the place where he is worshipped, the place set apart for the preaching of the word. We acknowledge this. Every one will allow, that he is only in the church at all because he believes that God has appointed the ministry, and approves the ministration; designs the ordinances as the chief means by which the gospel should be preached, and those who receive it be instructed, guided, edified, and strengthened. Let us attend, then, in a corresponding spirit: in a spirit of earnest expectation like that of the company at Joppa, that "God will come unto us, and bless us," that Christ will realize his gracious promise, and "be in the midst of those" who are met together in his name.⁵

Under the influence of such expectation and attention, we may justly exclaim with the Psalmist; "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! Blessed are they that dwell in thy house! For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand."⁶

⁵ See Exodus xx. 24. Matthew xviii. 20.

⁶ Psalm lxxxiv. 1, 4, 10.

LECTURE XXX.

PETER PREACHES THE GOSPEL TO CORNELIUS
AND HIS FRIENDS.—A. D. 41.

ACTS x. 34—48.

34. *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons :*

35. *But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

Very different was the opinion of the Jewish people; and of Peter himself, before the vision had enlightened him. St. Paul represents their opinion, (Rom. ii. 17,) “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things which are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind; a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.”

Such was the general sentiment; still more broadly expressed in another passage: “We who are Jews by nature; not sinners of the Gentiles.”¹

¹ Gal. ii. 15.

Peter is alluding to this national feeling, when he declares the impression produced upon his mind by the vision which he had seen and the events connected with it. Now *I perceive*—what I had never understood before—that *God is no respecter of persons*, “puts no difference”² between us Jews and others: *but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

We find no difficulty in subscribing to this sentiment. It needs no vision to convince us of its truth. But, alas! where, but among them to whom he has revealed his name and his will, where shall we find those, who do *fear God and work righteousness*?

This, however, we know; and in this we are content to rest. “When the Gentiles, (Rom. ii. 14,) which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves;” “For there is no respect of persons with God.”

Nay, more also is revealed to us. “That servant (Luke xii. 47) which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”

All the rest we leave to Him who shall “judge

² Ch. xv. 9.

the world in righteousness.” “Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.” “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.”³

The apostle now proceeds to the purpose of this divine interposition, which had brought together so unexpectedly the assembly in which he found himself.

36. *The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)*

37. *That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached:*

38. *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.*

39. *And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:*

40. *Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly;*

41. *Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.⁴*

42. *And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.*

³ Rev. xv. 3; xvi. 7.

⁴ The different witnesses are recounted by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 4—8.

43. *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.”⁵ Cornelius and his household did fear God. We were told this, when he first was mentioned. And now his covenant is revealed to them. God makes this household the first fruits of the Gentiles, and sends his apostle, who shall bring them to the knowledge of Christ: shall “preach unto them Jesus, delivered for our offences, and risen again for our justification.”

But mark, further, what it is no less important to observe. These truths *are* revealed to Cornelius. He is not passed by, as though he needed them not. It is not said concerning him, Here is a man who fears God with all his house, who gives much alms to the poor, who prays to God alway. Such an one needs no repentance, no remission of sin. On the contrary, to this devout and just man is the apostle sent, *preaching peace by Jesus Christ*: sent expressly “to tell him words, whereby he and all his house shall be saved.”⁶ The salvation of Cornelius must still be due to that name, which is “the only name under heaven given among men, whereby we may be saved.” Had he lived before the Son of God, coming in the flesh, had fulfilled the work of man’s redemption, his salvation would have been still of Christ. He would have shared the blessing, though ignorant of its author; like those others “*of every*

⁵ Ps. xv. 14.

⁶ See the following chapter, v. 14.

nation, who fearing God and working righteousness are accepted of him." Now, however, through especial favour, the author of this salvation is revealed to him : and as we see in the account which follows, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."⁷

44. *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*

45. *And they of the circumcision which believed, were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

46. *For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,*

47. *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we ?*

48. *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.*

Like the star at the Saviour's birth,⁸ which conducted the Eastern strangers, till it "brought them to the place where the young child was ;"—so now the vision related in this chapter had fulfilled the purpose for which God designed it. It had brought Cornelius to Peter, and Peter to Cornelius : the apostle of the Jews to the man of heathen race. It had shown to *them of the circumcision, as many as came with Peter, that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.* From this time all respect of persons should be done away : no man should forbid that the Gentiles should be received

⁷ 1 Thess. i. 5.

⁸ Matt. ii. 9.

into covenant. Before, we perceive plainly that it would have been forbidden. But now the will of God was made clear. God had “granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life.”

Thus another important step was taken in the progress of the gospel. “The people which walked in darkness have seen a great light: and upon them which lay in the valley of the shadow of death hath the light shined.” The first fruits had been offered up of a vast harvest: of that “multitude which no man can number; which being *baptized in the name of the Lord*, shall be received into God’s favour, engaged in his service, and prepared for his heavenly kingdom. And many would be the subjects of thankfulness and wonder with Peter and this converted household, when they *prayed him to tarry with them certain days*.

LECTURE XXXI.

PETER EXPLAINS TO THE DISCIPLES OF JERUSALEM THE ADMISSION OF THE GENTILES TO THE PRIVILEGES OF THE GOSPEL.—A. D. 41.

Acts xi. 1—18.

1. *And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.*

2. *And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,*¹

3. *Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.*

The wide separation between the Jews and other nations is here brought again before us. So great had been the effect of their law, their worship, their ceremonies, and ordinances. It was made a serious charge against Peter, that he *went in to men uncircumcised, and did eat with them*. We might expect him to reply: God “has made of one blood all the nations of the earth.” He in whom we believe, he “is able to save all that come to God through him.” It was foretold of him, that he should “be a light to lighten the Gentiles.” Ought I to hide that light? Ought I to close the treasure which has been opened? Ought I to say to *them of the circumcision*, God has mercy in store for you; but to the Gentile, he must perish in his sins?

This he might justly have said, if he had not been himself a Jew by birth and education. But such he was; and, as such, he only defends himself, by appealing to the revelation of God.

4. *But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,*

5. *I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a*

¹ *They of the circumcision*: those who being Jews by birth had been circumcised in their infancy, and those who having become proselytes to the Jewish faith, had conformed to that ordinance.

great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners ; and it came even to me :

6. *Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.*

7. *And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter ; slay and eat.*

8. *But I said, Not so, Lord : for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.*

9. *But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

10. *And this was done three times : and all were drawn up again into heaven.*

11. *And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me.*

12. *And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house :*

13. *And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter ;*

14. *Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.*

15. *And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.*

16. *Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.*

17. *Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ ;² what was I, that I could withstand God ?*

18. *When they heard these things, they held their peace.*

² Unto us, upon our believing : when we embraced the faith : πιστευσασιν. — Scholcfield.

and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

It was no reproach to the Jew, that he had looked upon other nations as “aliens from God,” and therefore from himself: God had designed that the Jews should be thus kept separate from the abominations of idolatry. It was rather proof of a softened, subdued mind, a mind taught of the Spirit, that the disciples yielded so readily to the words of Peter: *held their peace*, made no more dispute or murmur, but *glorified God* for his mercy, though it admitted others to the same privilege as themselves.

But we ought to mark the expression here employed. Then hath God also to the Gentiles *granted* repentance unto life. This expression teaches us to think and speak of repentance in a way in which it is not always thought or spoken of. It teaches us to judge of it as a gift or favour, that a man is allowed to return to God: to leave a course of sinful or worldly vanities, to “serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.”

We are bound, indeed, justly bound, to regard repentance as a duty on the part of man. Unquestionably it is a duty, for neglecting which those who do neglect it are left under just condemnation. But we must never forget (though in our way of speaking and thinking we sometimes appear to forget it) that it is also a gift, a most gracious gift, on the part of God, if his Spirit softens the heart, and brings it to himself. We must never forget the

greatness of the favour, if the corrupt child of Adam is received into God's family, or the penitent sinner enjoys his offended Father's pardon.

Whatever may be the present state of any man, let him see this important matter in its proper light.

If he be in a state of favour, "accepted in the beloved," at "peace with God through Jesus Christ;" there is little fear, lest he should not justly estimate the mercy shown him. It is part of that mercy, that he is sensible of it: part of the grace bestowed, that he knows and feels the blessing: the blessing, that he has been led to "lay hold on eternal life," and not left among the "many called," but never "chosen."

But there may be those (there are, alas! too many in our land) who, with opportunities which the Gentiles never had, are still living as the Gentiles lived, and not less needing repentance. *Repentance unto life* may be *granted* to them also. But no man can repent, unless the Spirit influence him. And that mercy, to be obtained, must be rightly sought: and to be rightly sought, it must be sought of God: sought as an incalculable favour; sought as an unmerited favour.

Represent to your minds the poorest beggar that ever sat by the way-side: one who had nothing of his own to entitle him to notice, or prepare him for high distinction: one, who had been brought to his low condition, not by misfortune, but by vice: by neglect of opportunities which might have instructed him, or by misuse of advantages which might have raised him.

It is a dark picture. But it is the picture of those who in this christian land are living as wilful transgressors of the law of God. What claim have they to favour? They are ignorant, though God has put the Bible in their hands. They are covetous and worldly, though God has warned them to provide for heaven. They are intemperate, impure, sensual, though God has declared that those who are such, have no inheritance in his kingdom. They know that “the Lord is at hand:” yet they do not “prepare to meet Him.”

The degraded, and ignorant, and self-ruined beggar which I have described, could little expect that the sovereign of the country should seek him out, should clothe him, should educate him, should admit him into his own palace, should treat him as one of his own family.

Yet this is what God does, when he *grants repentance*. When he says, “Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you”—he is in real truth saying:—Thou hast defied me, but I forgive thee: thou art ignorant, but I will teach thee: thou art corrupt and vile, but I will convert and heal thee: thou art naked, but I will clothe thee: thou art destitute, and hast “destroyed thyself;” but I will receive thee into my palace, and give thee a place at the right hand of my throne for ever.

If we consider *repentance unto life*, and examine its nature, and its consequences, what it is, and what it leads to—we shall perceive that here is a just representation of it. And, if so, “judge, I pray you, between” God and his people, whether

repentance unto life is not justly called a gift, a grant, a favour.

It is, however, a favour, which he loves to grant, for he is rich in mercy. When the prodigal “was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”³ “For the Lord our God is a merciful God, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin.” “He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,” and to the knowledge of that great truth, that “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin.”

LECTURE XXXII.

THE GOSPEL RECEIVED AT ANTIOCH BOTH BY
JEWES AND GRECIANS, AND A CHURCH FORMED,
WHICH IS VISITED BY BARNABAS.—A. D. 41.

Acts xi. 19—24.

19. *Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.*

We were told in chapter viii. that “they which were scattered abroad when Saul was “making

³ Luke xv. 20.

havoc of the church” at Jerusalem, “went everywhere preaching the word.” Their first resort was to their Jewish brethren. For a while they made the glad tidings known *to none but to the Jews only*. To them they would state, how while sojourning at Jerusalem, they had found the Messiah: “found him of whom Moses and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth:” how God had raised him from the dead, and “now commanded all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel.” This they had received themselves, and would exhort others to receive.

Meanwhile some of the same party took a bolder step.

20. *And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch,² spake unto the Grecians,³ preaching the Lord Jesus.*

21. *And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*

Here, then, that took place at Antioch, which had before taken place at Cæsarea. The word was

¹ Here, as before, the word implies *conversation* rather than *public preaching*. λαλουντες τον λογον. See on ch. viii. v. 4.

² Antioch would be not far out of the course of one intending to sail for Cyprus, from some port in the north of Syria.

³ A difficulty arises in the original from the word Ελληνισται, Grecians, commonly used to signify those of Hebrew parentage, but speaking the Greek language. This, however, must have been the case with the Jews, who are before mentioned, and mentioned in contrast with these Grecians. So that we are forced to understand here, by Grecians, persons who were by birth Gentiles. In some approved manuscripts the word is Ελληνες.

preached to the Grecians, or Gentiles. The same Holy Spirit which had appeared to Peter in a vision, and sent him to Cornelius, was now animating these men of Cyprus and Cyrene, in a manner more secret and imperceptible, but not less sure and effectual. The Spirit wrought with their natural feelings, yearning towards their Gentile neighbours, that they should have compassion on their darkness, and “guide their feet into the way of peace.”

In the former case Peter might at first have doubted as to the reality of the revelation. He might have supposed himself mistaken; beguiled by the visions of the night. But when he learnt that a corresponding vision had been sent to another person in a distant place, when he found the men whom Cornelius had despatched to seek him, he could doubt no longer; these two things could not have occurred together, unless they had been of God.

In like manner those who now applied themselves to these Grecians, might doubt at first whether they were acting rightly; were at liberty to preach the word to any *but unto the Jews only*. But when a great number of the Grecians believed, and turned unto the Lord, an end would be put to their doubts; however marvellous in their eyes, it was the Lord's doing. They turned to him, towards whom no man can turn “except the Father draw him.” And if the Father so drew these Grecians that they should turn unto the Lord, there was no further doubt as to the Father's will, whether they should

speaking unto the Grecians. It was only another mode of the Spirit's operation. The Spirit had said to Peter in plain words, Arise, and get thee down to Cornelius.⁴ The Spirit suggested to the minds of the Christians from Jerusalem, Preach the Lord Jesus to these "sinners of the Gentiles." The vision had said to Cornelius, "Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon." And now the Spirit moved the heart of these Grecians that they should attend to the word spoken, and turn to the Lord. Thus, "there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."⁵

22. *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.*

23. *Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*

24. *For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.*

What may be called the head quarters of the church was at Jerusalem. There the apostles resided; from thence they directed measures which seemed desirable: and when needful, sent out some of their body, to make inquiry and advise.⁶

⁴ Ch. x. 20, &c.

⁵ 1 Cor. xii. 6.

⁶ So, ch. ix. 32. It came to pass as Peter passed through-out all quarters, he came down to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. Perhaps Barnabas was selected for the present mission, because being himself originally from Cyprus, (ch. iv. 36,) the neighbouring country where Antioch was situated, might not be strange to him.

Such a messenger was Barnabas. He was now considered as an apostle: and he came in the name of his brethren to Antioch, in consequence of the tidings which had reached their ears. Had it been laudable zeal, or had it been unwarranted rashness, which preached the word to the Grecians? This question was easily answered, the doubt speedily removed, when *he came and saw the grace of God*; saw undoubted signs of a work which belongs to the Spirit of God alone. He finds *a great number* who had gladly heard the word of those who spoke to them, *preaching the Lord Jesus*: and who having “received him and believed in his name,” had been made heirs of the everlasting covenant, and *added unto the Lord*.

We may easily conceive that great effects would follow the arrival of a man like Barnabas among such a company of believers. The persons who had hitherto preached Jesus unto them, had spoken in the fulness of their hearts:—what they had believed, they had declared; what they had heard and known they told; and what they felt, they had communicated. But here was a man, instructed in knowledge; mighty in the scriptures; able to bring out of his store “things new and old.” One too, *full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith*: who had for many years seen the progress of the word, and had experience of its effects upon the heart. He was also, we are informed, *a good man*:—some might have felt a lurking jealousy, when they saw that “God had granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life:” but it was not so with Barnabas:

he, when he saw the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

And very important was the main subject of his instruction, as here recorded. Our Lord, in his wonderful parable of the Sower, has told us what in such cases to fear and guard against. He has told of those, who when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time; afterward, when persecution or affliction ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.⁵ We have too much reason to dread this. We see the blossoms of the spring: the trees are white with them: it would seem as if the husbandman must "pull down his barns, and build greater," so large will be the store. But how few at last are gathered in! Some are rudely plucked off by violence; and some are gradually withered by untimely blasts; and some are unable to withstand the daily influence of the summer sun: and so one and another and another drops and fails, and small is the number which remains, to reward the planter's labour.

Alas! it is but too exact a picture of the effect of example, opposition, and temptation upon the frail and corrupt heart which has once received the truth with joy.

This then was the danger against which Barnabas warned the infant church at Antioch: *They had turned to the Lord* with sudden impulse: they

⁵ Mark iv. 17.

must *cleave to him with full purpose of heart*. For so the Lord himself had “said to those Jews which believed on him; If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” The value of the plant is neither in the blade nor in the blossom; but in the ripened fruit. And the “honest and good heart” is that which having “heard the word, keeps it, and brings forth fruit with patience.” “We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”⁸

LECTURE XXXIII.

A FLOURISHING CHURCH IS ESTABLISHED AT ANTIOCH, WHERE THE DISCIPLES WERE FIRST CALLED CHRISTIANS.—A. D. 43.

ACTS xi. 25, 26.

25. *Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul;*

26. *And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they as-*

⁸ John viii. 31. Luke viii. 15. Heb. iii. 14. James i. 12.

¹ Refer to chapter ix. 30.

sembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Hitherto, those converted to the faith have been spoken of as brethren, as disciples, as believers. The time was now come, when they should be distinguished by the name of him in whom they believed, whose disciples they were, and who had made them brethren. They were united together in a body under the title of Christians. And this honour was first given to the church of Antioch, where the grace of God had so remarkably prevailed.

Here, then, a new and peculiar class of men appears, an order of men unknown till within the last few years—unknown at Antioch till within the last few months. What has created them, and distinguished them from others ?

One had come into the world offering deliverance from sin, and from the consequences of sin : offering peace with an offended God : offering pardon and acceptance now, and in the end eternal life. “ He that heareth my word, and believeth in him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation ; but is passed from death unto life.” ²

This was either believed, or disbelieved ; received or refused. Some mocked ; some neglected ; others actively opposed themselves. These remained what they had been before ; they were

² John v. 24.

still followers of the law of Moses, or they were still Gentile idolaters. Those who were now for the first time called Christians were those who believed the message; received the offer: were baptized in the name of Christ, and professed themselves his disciples, his followers. And their faith was briefly this. The world is lost by sin: ruined through Adam's fall: "in Adam all died." But as many as commit themselves to Christ, sent of God for their deliverance, are recovered from that ruin; their sin is expiated: God treats them as righteous: and his Spirit makes them such; renews their nature, and prepares them for his heavenly kingdom.

The Jewish assembly, for example, (chapter iv. 12,) are told, that there is "salvation in no other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Those, then, who received this word gladly, and were baptized, "the multitude of them that believed," acknowledged the fact that in themselves they were ruined, and in Christ they were delivered from ruin. They that are safe need not a deliverer; —but they that are lost.

Such was the confession of these Christians concerning their own state. But what was He who had appeared as their deliverer? He was the Son of God, "who was in the beginning with God, and was God;" proved to be so, in that he had risen from the grave, and ascended up to the glory which he had with the Father "before the world was." When the Ethiopian (chap. viii. 37) de-

sired to be baptized, Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Then "he baptized him."

It was natural, therefore, that Christians should have been styled, *believers*. But this term alone did not completely describe them. They were also *disciples*. They looked up to Christ as a teacher as well as a redeemer. Had they been asked a reason of the practice, the new and peculiar practice which they followed, the reply would have been: He "whose we are," and to whom we have devoted ourselves, has left us an example, and laid down for us a law. We forgive our enemies, we avenge no injuries, because he, "when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not,"⁴ but committed his cause to God. We are ready to distribute, glad to communicate of this world's good, according as God hath prospered every man, because we are followers of him, who "when he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich."⁵ We "keep under our body, and bring it into subjection," because he has assured us that "such is the will of God, even our sanctification:" that they must be "pure in heart," who are to possess "the inheritance of the saints in light: that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." We "set our affections on things above, not on things of the earth," because we are taught of him to "lay up treasure

⁴ 1 Peter ii. 23.

⁵ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

in heaven." "For what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

The inquirer, who had gone thus far in acquainting himself with the faith of these Christians, must ask one question more, if he had any experience of his own heart. He must naturally proceed to say—How is this change produced in you? How are you enabled to moderate your affections; to subdue "the desires of the flesh and of the mind?" To live in the world, and not be of the world?

To this, too, there was an answer. We were "baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."⁶ It was promised, that as the children of God, through faith in his beloved Son, we should "receive the gift of the Holy Ghost," who should change our original nature, and "put a new heart and a right spirit within us," and bring us "to will and to do" that which is approved of God.⁷ And so we experience it to be. Old things are passed away: all things are become new. "We have put off the old man, which is corrupt after the deceitful lusts, and are renewed in the spirit of our mind; and have put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."⁸ So that now "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," are not objects of desire to be courted by us, but objects of suspicion to be dreaded.

⁶ Matt. xxviii. 17.

⁷ Chapter ii. 38. 2 Cor. i. 22. Eph. iv. 30.

⁸ Eph. iv. 22.

“They are not of the Father, but of the world.”⁹
And “the time is short.” “The Lord is at hand.”
“Our conversation is in heaven.” “We look not
at the things which are seen, and are temporal ;
but at the things which are unseen, and eternal.”

Such were those, who were *called Christians first in Antioch*. We have the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism. And we, too, are called Christians. Let it be with us as with them. Their faith and their practice were one. They received the doctrine, not to be acknowledged, but to be acted on. When all were dead, Christ died for all, that they which live, might live to him.¹ And so to live, is to be “his disciples indeed.”² They who do so live, will be known as CHRISTIANS, not only in this present world, but in the sight of men and angels at the great day.

⁹ 1 John ii. 17.

¹ 2 Cor. v. 15.

² John viii. 31.

LECTURE XXXIV.

THE CHRISTIANS OF ANTIOCH SEND RELIEF TO
THEIR FELLOW CHRISTIANS IN JUDEA.—A. D. 44.

ACTS xi. 27—30.

27. *And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.*

28. *And there stood up one of them, named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.*¹

Among the various gifts bestowed upon some members of the early church, was this of prophecy: not merely the interpretation of scripture, as the word often signifies, but the knowledge of events to come. This same Agabus who now foretels a famine, appears again after an interval of sixteen years, and predicts the dangers which awaited Paul at Jerusalem.² God therefore, it is plain, “gave some to be prophets.”³ This was among the operations

¹ As this famine is known to have happened in the year 44, we have here a certain date, and are sure that all the events hitherto related, had taken place within eleven years of our Lord’s ascension. The phrase *all the world*, is not meant to signify more than the whole country of Judea, and the parts adjoining.

² Ch. xxi. 10.

³ Eph. iv. 11.

of the Spirit which he saw necessary for the welfare of the church which he designed to raise.

29. *Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea :*

30. *Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

As far as we know or have reason to believe, this is the first transaction of the kind in the history of the world. Certain inhabitants of Antioch meet together, and hearing of a general calamity by which the inhabitants of another country, a distant and unconnected country, are brought into distress, make a common contribution, *every man according to his ability*, and send it for their relief.

If men enter upon a new course of conduct, we conclude that some new motive has been brought to bear upon them. In the present case what was that motive? *They determine to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea.* But men had always been *brethren*, descended from the same Father. They had always been united under a common lot, made subject to common calamities, which may be much alleviated by being shared. Still they had not been brought to look on one another in this light, as objects of mutual interest and assistance. Every man had “looked on his own things,” and no man on “the things of others.” Their private interests absorbed and employed them.

Now, however, a new system begins. A new

influence was coming into operation. Those who were united in the christian faith were bound together by ties which could not be unavailing. The love of God manifested in so extraordinary a manner towards themselves had set them an example which they must imitate, had imposed on them a duty which they must needs perform. St. John has explained this:⁴ “Brethren, herein was love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” We ought to love one another, when he has given us this proof of the way in which he regards mankind. We ought to love one another, because such is the will and the command of him who so loved us. And “he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”⁵ If he love not the children who are before his eyes, how can he love the Father who is far above out of his sight, but who has required this proof of his gratitude, this offering of a heart thankful for the benefits which it has received?

But there was another reason why these Christians were forward to assist their suffering brethren in a way which had not before been usual. They had learnt to look upon the things of this world in a new light. They had learnt to see their possessions as something beyond means of private enjoyment, or personal gratification: to see them as

⁴ Eph. iv. 10.⁵ John iv. 20.

given for a purpose, and to be employed for a purpose. The bent of the heart is shown by the manner in which these earthly things are used. And the heart is shown to be rightly bent, when they are used to honour and serve the Almighty giver.

“The children of this generation” see but one use of wealth : how they may most fully gratify the inclination which urges them most strongly : whether it be to hoard up stores which their family may afterwards enjoy, or whether it be to follow a course of vanity and self-indulgence. Too commonly, their language is that expressed in our Lord’s parable ; “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.”⁶ Then, in the pursuit of the objects which gratify them, their fortune is engaged : and even if they had the inclination to be charitable, they have not left to themselves the means.

It is not so with one who has received the faith of Christ as the rule by which he is to live. He knows that this world’s good is a talent placed in his hands, of which he is to make use in conformity with the will of him to whom he owes it. That will is laid down in terms too clear to be mistaken. (1 Tim. vi. 17.) “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy : that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to com-

⁶ Luke. xii. 19.

municate : laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

Under this view, it was given as a rule to these early Christians, that “upon the first day of the week every one of them should lay by him in store according as God had prospered him.”⁷ This produced a common stock, for the use of “the household of faith :” for the christian family congregated together : partly to support the pastors and teachers, and partly to assist the destitute persons of the flock. Sometimes, as on this occasion, there was a further call, for the relief of more distant brethren. These were of the same family, though settled elsewhere : still they were disciples of the same Lord, and had the same faith and hope as the Christians of Antioch. *So that every man, according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea.*

Charity, however, like wisdom, “dwells with prudence.”⁸ The fund which might have been useless, perhaps injurious, unless placed under discreet management, was entrusted to the care of *the elders*. Elders, it appears, had been ordained, as was indispensable, over the different churches throughout Judea.⁹ And the distribution of the relief fund was placed in their hands.

It is thus that God intends that Christians should minister to one another. He has placed them in different ranks, and with different oppor-

⁷ 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

⁸ See Prov. viii. 12.

⁹ See Note p. 132.

tunities, and has given them a bond of union. They are not connected by an uniform condition, which is contrary to the course of the world. But they are connected by a common interest, under which what is superfluous to some, makes up what is wanting to others. So “the rich and the poor meet together : the Lord is the maker of them all.”¹

LECTURE XXXV.

THE APOSTLE JAMES IS PUT TO DEATH BY HEROD, AND PETER IMPRISONED.—A. D. 44.

ACTS xii. 1—5.

1. *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.*

2. *And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.*

The disposition to *vex the church* was never wanting. There were times when “the churches had rest.” But the malignity of the Jews towards those who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah remained : like a violent stream, sometimes pent up within its banks, but always ready at any opportunity to break out, and overwhelm the christian

¹ Prov. xxii. 2.

disciples who were quietly pursuing their own way. The present king or ruler, Herod Agrippa, grandson of him who had beheaded John the Baptist, was a willing instrument of persecution. And now he fulfils the Lord's prediction concerning James. The mother of James and John, (Matt. xx. 20,) had desired of the Lord for her two sons, that "they might sit, the one on his right hand, the other on his left, in his kingdom." This led him to intimate that his kingdom was not such as they supposed, or mankind covet: that, as it regarded this world, its honours were dangers, its rewards sufferings. "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with."

This was now accomplished in the case of James. The Father gave him a share of the bitter cup, of which Christ had drunk before. He was baptized with the baptism of blood and death. But there was another prophecy which should support him unto the end. "He that loveth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."¹

Now, for the first time, as far as we are told, was a breach made in the number of the twelve: the number first chosen to "go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." When Judas "fell by transgression" from his office,

¹ Matt. x. 39.

Matthias was admitted in his stead. But the Head of the Church did not design that any should supply the place of James. The apostles' office was but for a time, till "the gospel of the kingdom should be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations."² Elders, as we have seen, or presbyters of congregations, and afterwards bishops of districts, carried on the government of the church.

3. *And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)*

4. *And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.*

The business of a ruler is to do justice and love mercy.³ Herod the king had no such principle of action. He desired power, and he desired popularity that he might maintain his power. And, therefore, when he saw that his cruelty to James *pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.* His grandfather had been a like character, regarding men, and not God. He "was exceeding sorry" to command that John the Baptist should be beheaded: "nevertheless for the oath's sake, and those that sat at meat with him," he consented to gratify Herodias.⁴ Pilate was a like character. He, too, was earnestly desirous to release Jesus, and he would have released him, if the chief

² Matt. xxiv. 14.

³ See Rom. xiii. 1—7.

⁴ Matt. xiv. 9.

priests had not reminded him, that if he let that man go, he would not be “Cæsar’s friend.” This hint prevailed, and he delivered up Jesus to be crucified.

How different the conduct which is governed by the fear of God ! The apostles had more cause than Herod to desire the favour of the Jewish authorities. Yet they, when they were commanded not to preach at all or teach in the name of Jesus, —they immediately replied, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” St. Paul truly says, “If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.” No one can be the servant of Christ, who makes it his object to please men. He may obtain, and is not unlikely to obtain, the approbation of God and of men also. But he will never be approved of God if he seeks first to be approved of men.

5. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Herod had means in his power to guard Peter. He had a prison at his command in which to confine him : he had soldiers under orders to watch him. *Four quaternions*, or sixteen men, had him in charge. A particular time was fixed, when Jerusalem was full, and the festival of the passover had excited the minds of the people, when he should be brought forth, and made the sport of their violence and malice.

Meanwhile the Christians were not idle. They, too, had means at command. As Herod guarded Peter with such power as he could employ, so did

the church defend him with such assistance as God had granted them. *Prayer without ceasing was made of the church unto God for him.* We need hardly be told, that it was not cold or formal prayer ; but urgent and incessant : ⁵ such prayer as men might use who saw there was no other help, whose hearts were still bleeding from the loss of James, and who felt the inestimable value of Peter to the church.

For the present, we leave them thus engaged. But not without remarking what often appears in this history, the different tempers of the parties. On the one side was Herod, intending and preparing for cruelty, that he might gratify the bad passions of the people, which as a governor he ought to have restrained ; and the people themselves waiting in malicious expectation, ⁶ that they might indulge their enmity against the apostle. On the other side, were assemblies of persons, not stirring up adverse passions, not opposing evil by evil, but addressing themselves to God, and laying their case before him : not imploring his anger to avenge them of their enemies, but his mercy to preserve their friend.

Surely Herod's cause is not as the Christian's cause, "even our enemies themselves being judges."⁷ On one side envy, hatred, wrath, malice : on the other, gentleness, humbleness of mind, meekness, faith, long-suffering. Surely it

⁵ ἐκτενής, intense.

⁶ See verse 11.

⁷ Deut. xxxi. 32.

is manifest which party is led by the Spirit of God. Surely we shall say, each one for himself, this “people shall be my people, and their God my God.”⁸

LECTURE XXXVI.

PETER MIRACULOUSLY DELIVERED FROM HIS PRISON.—A. D. 44.

Acts xii. 6—17.

6. *And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains : and the keepers before the door kept the prison.*

7. *And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison ; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.*

8. *And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals : and so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.*

9. *And he went out, and followed him ; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel ; but thought he saw a vision.*

10. *When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city ; which opened to them of his own accord : and they went*

⁸ See Ruth i. 16.

out, and passed on through one street ; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

When our Lord (Luke iv. 16—19) gives account of the purposes for which he had come into the world, one of these purposes is that he might “bring deliverance to the captives, and set at liberty them that are bound.” He does not speak of such captivity, or such deliverance as that of Peter here. But there is room for a comparison which deserves attention.

The enmity of Satan had stimulated Herod, taking advantage of his natural character, to exercise his power against the apostle ; and when the angel found him, *he was sleeping between two soldiers. Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains : and the keepers before the door kept the prison.* It was a different sleep from that in which the ungodly man is lying. One is the repose of peace : the other a death-like slumber. But still it furnishes an example. It well represents the state in which the sinner is found, the victim, not of Herod, but of Satan, if God sees fit to awake him. He is “tied and bound with the chain” of his habitual sins ; he is sleeping in the lethargy of indifference towards all spiritual things : and those around him, who are living in the same bondage, *keep the prison* ; by their discourse, by their habits, and by the restraint which they occasion, they prevent any access to him of such instruction or advice as shall interrupt the sleep of death in which he lies.

When it pleased God to deliver Peter, *behold,*

the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And the chains fell off from his hands.

So it sometimes happens, and no less unexpectedly, that a sinner is roused from his apathy. Some voice of the Lord's sending, whether of sorrow, or misfortune, or advice, or example, seems to say to him, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." He is brought to see, what he had never seen before: *a light shines in the prison*, discovering to him at once his state of danger, and his way of safety: and he is warned to *arise up quickly*, for "the time is short:" to "seek the Lord while he may be found:" to "return unto the Lord, that he may abundantly pardon."

There is a source, from which the light is derived. That source is Christ; who declared of himself, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me may not abide in darkness."

There is an object, on which the light is thrown. Christ is that object. The light which shines from him, directs to him: for his words are, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

And soon, *the chains fall from his hands*. The fetters are loosed, which before had bound him: the sins which had held him fast, as by walls that could not be surmounted, give way before the omnipotent command. He is delivered from the worst bondage, the most oppressive tyranny, and

walks “in the glorious liberty” of the children of God. He experiences the reality of that gracious promise, “The truth shall make you free.” And I may add, like Peter here, he is impatient to avow from whom he has received the blessing.

11. *And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.*

12. *And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark ; where many were gathered together praying.*

13. *And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.*

14. *And when she knew Peter’s voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.*

15. *And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.¹*

16. *But Peter continued knocking : and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.*

17. *But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.*

The ways of God are always directed by the same wisdom, though they are not always similar. He saw fit to deliver Peter, though he had permitted the death of James. In one case as in the

¹ Spoken, probably, under some superstitious notion of the occasional appearance of the form and likeness of a person about the period of his departure from the world.

other, each might have said to Herod, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.”² Well assured of this, the Christians had sought relief from God in their extremity. While *Peter was kept in prison, prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.* And even in the dark hours of the night, when he came to the house of Mary,³ *many were gathered together praying.* They were led, no doubt, to join in supplication even at that unseasonable hour, because the danger was now imminent: it was the night before he was to be brought forth, when *the expectation of the people* had been roused to look for a malicious gratification. To human eye, there seemed no room for hope. Herod was determined: the people were implacable: the soldiers were watchful, the prison was secure. But “is anything too hard for the Lord?” *He sent his angel, and delivered Peter out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.*

It may be thought, that this deliverance, however wonderful, affords no encouragement to ourselves. The days of such interference were short, and have long since passed: and we do not expect them to return.

God, however, has always means to execute his purposes. Other ministers besides angels may “do his pleasure.” He can, when he will, open a pri-

² John xix. 11.

³ A sister of Barnabas: as appears by Col. iv. 10

son-door: and he can, when he will, open a ruler's heart. In this case, instead of changing the mind of Herod, he performed a different miracle. But he might as easily have accomplished his purpose by turning the mind of Herod.

Let us therefore "ask in faith, nothing wavering:" but believing the simple assurance, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."⁴ In all the changes and chances of this mortal life, we have one comfort, and no other; we are permitted to "cast our care upon God, knowing that he careth for us:"⁵ and that "the angel of his presence" accompanies his people in all their troubles, and watches them in all their trials.

LECTURE XXXVII.

THE DEATH OF HEROD.—A. D. 44.

Acts xii. 18—25.

18. *Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.*

19. *And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Cesarea, and there abode.*

20. *And Herod was highly displeased with them of*

⁴ James i. 6; v. 16.

⁵ 1 Peter v. 7.

Tyre and Sidon : but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace ; because their country was nourished by the king's country.

Here is a practical example of the wisdom which is recommended by our Lord, (Matthew v. 25,) “ Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him.” They of Tyre and Sidon were keenly alive to the disadvantages which they should suffer, if Herod were against them : their own country drew its wealth from their connexion with the territory over which he ruled, therefore they engaged a friend to mediate for them, and *desired peace*.

When the evil to be dreaded is of a temporal nature, it is quickly perceived and guarded against. But many can allow year after year to pass, without *desiring peace* with God : without seeking to be reconciled to him, who can alone *nourish* them in prosperity or health : in whom “ they live and move ;” and above all, to whom, at the last, they must “ give account.”

21. *And upon a set day, Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.*

22. *And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.*

23. *And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory : and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

24. *But the word of God grew, and multiplied.*

25. *And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem,*

when they had fulfilled their ministry,¹ and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

All disease and death come by the appointment of God, and all disease and death are the consequence of sin. “By one man sin came into the world, and death by sin.” So that whether we witness the strong man “cut down like a flower,” or the aged man gradually withering, we equally see the hand of God, we equally see the effect of sin.

But a case like this of Herod strikes the mind most forcibly. To-day he is *arrayed in royal apparel, seated on his throne*, courts and receives the applause of the surrounding multitude: who give him honours to which man has no claim, which are due to God alone. For if there is “a spirit in man,” it is “the inspiration of the Almighty which giveth understanding.”²

Thus it is to-day. Herod is extolled as more than man. To-morrow he is less than man. It pleases God no longer to permit him the use of health and strength, which he did not employ to his glory. *Immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.* He is consumed by a loathsome disorder, more grievous than those which usually bring life to a close; and he whom so lately a whole people were applauding,

¹ Charge, or service: especially that of carrying to the brethren in Judea the contributions from Antioch. Acts xi. 30.

² Job xxxii. 8.

can scarcely command the services of the meanest attendant. Thus “pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”³

We have an example in the book of Daniel which much resembles this case of Herod. (Dan. iv. 30.) Nebuchadnezzar, like Herod, was lifted up by the pride of his wealth and majesty. “He walked in the palace, and the king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar.” His reason was taken from him, and he became “as the beasts of the field.” And expressly as a judgment upon his pride. “Until he knew that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”

Now contrast with this natural pride and vain glory the conduct which springs from the grace of God.

Solomon had a far greater share of understanding than Herod: and the magnificence of “great Babylon,” in which Nebuchadnezzar boasted, could not surpass the grandeur of the palace and the temple built by Solomon. But no sooner had he brought that vast and glorious work to an end, than his thoughts turned to Him by whose goodness he had been enabled to raise it. He de-

³ Prov. xvi. 18.

icated it to God, and implored his blessing, as that which could alone establish or preserve it. (1 Kings viii. 55.) “Solomon stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised. The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us.” “And the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice unto the Lord.”

“What hast thou, O man, that thou didst not receive?” And “who maketh thee to differ from another?”⁴ These are reflections which the people of God will cherish, whatever their advantages may be: and with thoughts like these they keep their spirits meek, and *give God the glory*. David, for example, when seated on the throne of Israel. “Then went king David in, (2 Samuel vii. 18,) and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?” What have I or my family to boast of, that I have been thus distinguished; that thou hast brought me to this honour? “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the praise.”

Herod was cut down in his pride. And it does not follow, but that another may be cut down in his humility: and that even a spirit like that of David or Solomon may not always preserve to a man his earthly prosperity or possessions. But such

⁴ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

a spirit sanctifies wealth and honour; and such a spirit will not be overwhelmed, though honours, or friends, or riches “make to themselves wings and flee away.” For the Christian knows, that here is not his rest. He knows, that “if our earthly house of this tabernacle were destroyed, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”⁵ Therefore his “conversation” is there, where his best and sure possessions are laid up. And he “looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”⁶

LECTURE XXXVIII.

BARNABAS AND SAUL SET OUT ON THEIR MINISTRY, UNDER A SPECIAL COMMISSION. THE SORCERER ELYMAS IS STRUCK WITH BLINDNESS. —A. D. 45.

ACTS xiii. 1—12.

1. *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*¹

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 1.

⁶ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

¹ Lucius is mentioned fifteen years afterwards, in the epistle

2. *As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

3. *And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*

4. *So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia ; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.*

Barnabas and Saul had long been dedicated to the work of the ministry, had been already acting as apostles. But it seemed good to the Spirit, in directing the affairs of the church, that their employment for a particular purpose should be attended with a fresh and solemn commission. That purpose was to go widely through different countries, and repeat elsewhere the works which had been wrought at Antioch. The intimation was given in a way not here explained, but which could not be mistaken. And after a special meeting for fasting and prayer, the prophets and teachers of the church dismiss them with a benediction. *They laid their hands upon them, and sent them away.* Not with the object of bestowing any spiritual gift upon them : for in such view “ the less,” as St. Paul says, “ is blessed of the greater ;”² and Lucius and Simeon were inferior to Saul and Barnabas. It was a solemn and customary mode of invoking the divine favour upon their heads, that it might be with them, and rest upon them.

to the Romans, xvi. 21. Manaen was the foster-brother of Herod Antipas. Thus is “ one taken, and another left.”

² Heb. vii. 7.

5. *And when they were at Salamis,³ they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.³*

6. *And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:*

7. *Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.*

8. *But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.*

This *false prophet*, or *sorcerer*, like Simon in Samaria, (ch. viii. 9,) was one who used the arts of divination, and pretended to superhuman knowledge. He soon perceived that his livelihood was in danger, if the faith which these apostles preached was listened to. The false prophet would be rejected, if the true prophet was received. So he *endeavoured to turn aside the deputy* (the Roman proconsul) from the faith which was beginning to take possession of his heart. He *withstood* Barnabas and Saul.

Sergius Paulus is justly called a *prudent man*. Hearing that ministers of religion were in his island, he neither opposed nor despised their doctrine, but *desired to hear them*. He had wisdom to see that the subject was important, and ought not to be treated with neglect. And it is a favourable sign, one which Satan sees with jealousy, when inquiry

³ Salamis and Paphos were considerable towns in the island of Cyprus.

⁴ See ch. xii. 12.

is made upon the subject of religion, when those who teach it are allowed to explain their views, and show on what ground they rest, instead of being rejected with indignity, as unworthy of a hearing. Elymas therefore, as Satan's instrument, endeavoured to prevent the effect which he feared from the word of truth, and *he withstood Barnabas and Saul.*

9. *Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) ⁵ filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him.*

10. *And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*

11. *And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about, seeking some to lead him by the hand.*

12. *Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*

Such power was given to the apostles, and used as the Holy Spirit suggested, to support the gospel cause. Many might be disposed to say, Here was a sentence of severity. *Thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.* But, in truth, it was an act of mercy.

It was an act of mercy to Sergius the governor, because it confirmed his wavering mind. *The deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.* It was an act of mercy, to bring him from the worship of

⁵ More familiar, as a Roman name, to those with whom he was hereafter to be chiefly concerned.

idols to the knowledge of the true and living God : to change his condition from the death of sin to the life of righteousness : to bestow on him “the unsearchable riches of Christ :” to make him heir of the inheritance above. From all this Elymas would have excluded him ; seeking to *turn him aside from the faith*, and to *pervert the right ways of the Lord*. The hand of the Lord was exerted to show on which side was truth, and on which side was falsehood. And the blindness brought on Elymas, was a light to Sergius, to “guide his feet into the way of peace.”

But further, the same sentence might prove an act of mercy to Elymas himself. We hear no more of him. But if it led him to repentance, it was the greatest mercy he could have received. Thou shalt be blind, *not seeing the sun for a season*. It was not therefore a hopeless calamity ; it was but *for a season* : he might yet feel that he had sinned against the Lord, while speaking against the words of life ; and the Lord might put away his sin. The Lord of hosts had said concerning his rebellious people, while bringing upon them desolation and captivity, “Behold, I will melt them, and try them.”⁶ And the “fiery indignation” which was heaped upon the head of Elymas may have been the means of melting his hard heart, and giving it a better mould.

It is the business of faith to look on earthly things, whether prosperous or adverse, as they bear

⁶ Jer. ix. 7.

on everlasting interests. Calamity, disease, privation, may be blessings, if they awaken from lethargy, reclaim from sin, and detach the heart from worldly vanities. He who loved us, and proved his love to us as love was never proved before, has left us an assurance : “ It is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”⁷ And so “ the destruction of the flesh ” is profitable, “ that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”⁸

The same apostle, however, who called down upon Elymas this judgment, has instructed us, that such judgments are the “ strange work,”⁹ and can only be regarded as belonging to peculiar times and cases. The common and universal rule is, that “ the servant of the Lord must not strive ; (2 Tim. ii. 24 :) but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves ; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth ; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

⁷ Matt. v. 30.

⁸ 1 Cor. v. 5.

⁹ Is. xxviii. 21.

LECTURE XXXIX.

PAUL REASONS WITH THE JEWS AT ANTIOCH
IN PISIDIA.—A. D. 45.

Acts xiii. 13—25.

13. *Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.*

Why John, or Mark, departed from Paul and his company, is not related here. But in a succeeding chapter the subject occurs again. And there it appears that there had been in Mark a want of zeal, with which Paul was dissatisfied. He did not approve the receiving one again as an assistant, “who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.”¹

Slowly, if at all, is the mind weaned from earthly affections, and enabled to give itself wholly and unreservedly to God’s service. There were then, as there are now, some stations more unfavourable than others, some employments more exposed to danger. And then, as now, there was reason to complain, that too many “seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.”² Some desired ease. Others shunned apparent danger. Others

¹ Ch. xv. 37.

² See Phil. ii. 21.

preferred the neighbourhood of their near connexions. This probably was the case with Mark. He was from Jerusalem, and desired to return to Jerusalem again. Those may justly be accounted blessed, whose minds are so regulated that the path of duty is the path of choice; whose will is bound up in the providence of God concerning them.

14. *But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia,³ and went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and sat down.*

15. *And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.*

The law and the prophets, we see, were “read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”⁴ *The word of exhortation* followed: and the apostles were invited to furnish it. So it happened on a similar occasion, (as we learn in Luke iv. 16,) that our Lord himself first declared the fulfilment in his own person of the promises of God.” He came to Nazareth:” he read to the congregation in the synagogue some of the most remarkable predictions of the Messiah. And then he said unto them, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

What Jesus had done in Nazareth, Paul was now to do in Pisidia: having present before him both men of Israel his brethren, and others, not

³ An important town in Asia Minor, very distant from the other Antioch, and on the road towards the more civilized and commercial parts of Asia, towards which they were now travelling.

⁴ Ch. xv. 20.

Jews by birth, but proselytes: those who, like Cornelius, had been brought to *fear God* through the scriptures, and the example of the Jews who lived amongst them.

16. *Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand, said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.*

17. *The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dicelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.*

18. *And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.*

19. *And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.*

20. *And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.*

21. *And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.*

22. *And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.*

23. *Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus;*

24. *When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.*

25. *And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.⁵*

Paul had an event to explain, and he traces it to

⁵ Whose servant I am not worthy to be.

its source, by a brief review of the Jewish history. Throughout this history God had a determined purpose which was now fulfilled.

This people of Israel had always been a peculiar people. They worshipped a God whom other nations knew not. And the God whom they worshipped exerted his power to raise them out of the bondage of Egypt, and *with an high arm brought he them out of it.*

He supported them forty years whilst they wandered through the wilderness, till he permitted them to settle in the promised land of Canaan, casting out seven nations greater and mightier than they, and planting them in.

He governed them by judges, and he governed them by kings: but he still kept his eye upon them; and it was plain for all to perceive that there was a dispensation yet to come which his providence was gradually preparing. Promises were made to David and his line, which long remained unfulfilled, whilst devout men were “looking for the consolation of Israel.”

But now of David’s seed had *God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus*;—a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord:—his name was called Jesus, because “he should save his people from their sins.”

His coming had been announced. *John had first preached the baptism of repentance.* But John had assured his followers, *I am not he*: he who should come. *There cometh one after me, whose shoes I am not worthy to loose.*

Paul's hearers are thus led on to the announcement which he was about to declare. A great preparation had been made. From the beginning God had chosen the descendants of Abraham, and had separated them from all other nations; had given them a country to dwell in, had appointed and honoured their rulers. But the end was not yet. There was something still beyond. And expectation had been lately roused by the voice which cried, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Thus he opens the way for the Messiah: prepares the ground, that it may better receive the truth with which he was charged: namely, that "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners had spoken in times past unto their fathers by the prophets, had in these last days spoken unto them by his Son."⁶

The event, though long waited for, had fulfilled the expectation: had justified the assurance of the prophet Habakkuk (ii. 3.) "The vision is yet for an appointed time; but in the end it shall speak, it shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it: it will surely come; it will not tarry."

And so, of all God's promises. The scoffers of one age, like the scoffers of another, may say, and will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? All things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."⁷ Meanwhile, his purposes are proceeding: for "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one

⁶ Heb. i. 1.

⁷ See 2 Pet. xiv. 4—8. Ib. 14.

day.” One object, and no other, is worthy of our anxiety or diligence: that whenever his final dispensations are disclosed, for which these earthly revelations are designed to prepare us, “we may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

LECTURE XL.

PAUL'S ADDRESS TO THE JEWS CONTINUED.

A. D. 45.

ACTS xiii. 26—41.

26. *Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.*

So Paul assures the Jews his brethren, and the Gentile proselytes, who worshipped God together with them. *God, according to his promise, has raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.* But he is only a Saviour to those who trust in him. His gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”¹ Paul therefore appeals to those whom he was now addressing, that they should not, like too many in Judea, reject the counsel of God against themselves. *To you is the word of this salvation sent.* And let them not be offended

¹ Rom. i. 16.

at what the rulers had been allowed to do. It was only effecting God's purposes, and fulfilling his prophecies.

27. *For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath-day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.*

28. *And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.*

29. *And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.*

30. *But God raised him from the dead :*

31. *And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.*

32. *And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,*

33. *God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again ; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

34. *And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.²*

35. *Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.³*

36. *For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption :*

² Isa. lv. 3, 4. "Incline your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.

³ Ps. xvi. 10.

37. *But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.*

38. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man⁴ is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:*

39. *And by him, all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

The great object is here set forth, for which so long preparation had been made: *the forgiveness of sins. By this (Jesus) all that believe are justified.*

A man is justified when he is accounted righteous, when no accusation is maintained against him. In this sense, Job asks, “how can a man be justified with God?”⁵ And the Psalmist says, “In thy sight, O Lord, shall no man living be justified.”⁶

The gospel of Christ answers Job’s question, and meets this feeling of the Psalmist. No man can be accounted righteous according to his own works or deservings. Tried by them, he must be guilty before God. But he may be justified if God is pleased to absolve him and account him righteous. And God has promised so to justify all that commit themselves to his son Jesus. *By him all that believe are justified.*

To all it is an unwelcome truth, that in the sight of God they are guilty, and must come before him as suppliants. It is an humbling truth, against which the heart is too ready to contend.

But it was particularly unwelcome to the Jews, because they were confident of God’s favour, and “rested in the law of Moses.”⁷

⁴ Gr. *τουτου*—only the *pronoun*. By this *Jesus*.

⁵ Job. xxv. 4.

⁶ Ps. cxliii. 2.

⁷ Rom. ii. 17.

The apostle, however, must speak “not as pleasing men, but God :” and therefore he takes away the foundation on which he knew that they would ground themselves: he holds up Jesus Christ to them as justifying from all things, *from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

Undoubtedly that law had said, (Lev. xviii. 5,) “Ye shall keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them.”⁸ Undoubtedly the law had said, (Deut. vi. 25,) “It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.”

But, then, who had thus kept the statutes and the judgments, according to all the things that are written in the law blameless? Who could plead that he had fulfilled the two great commandments of the law—to go no farther—had loved God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself? Whose righteousness would stand, when examined after this strict rule? And therefore their own David had said, “There is none righteous, no not one.” “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, who shall stand?” “In thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

Thus far then it was plain that they *could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

But they might set up another plea, and urge that the law of Moses foresaw transgression, and provided for it, by the appointment of those sacri-

⁸ Compare Ezek. xx. 11.

fices which day by day, and year by year, were offered.

It did so. But they might perceive, on reflection, that these sacrifices could not be a real atonement for sin. They might furnish a type or emblem of atonement. They might foreshow God's purposes, and give an intimation of his counsels. They might keep up a sense of sin and of condemnation. But it was "not possible that the blood of bulls or of goats should take away sins."⁹ There could not really be in them any substitution of the innocent for the guilty, the redeemer for the sinner. The sacrifice itself gave proof of this. For if the sacrifice had been sufficient, then would the worshippers once purged (or justified) have had no more conscience of sins."¹ But the sacrifices of the law were offered daily, and were offered annually: and even the priest who offered them was himself included among those who needed propitiation. Whilst he offered atonement for the people, he must confess himself guilty as themselves.

Such sacrifices, then, could have no real efficacy: though God might declare his acceptance of them for a while.

But now He had appeared, who was the substance of all these shadows: and *by him all that believe are justified from all things*. He who, "after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God: for by one offer-

⁹ Heb. x. 4.

¹ Heb. x. 2.

ing he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”²

We may presume that these were the arguments by which Paul established the conclusion which he here lays down. Because in his epistles he proves on these grounds that “a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ:”³ that this is “the righteousness of God which is unto all and upon all them that believe.”⁴

And now, since all *the promise* had come to pass *which was made unto the fathers*: since *God had fulfilled the same, and given them the sure mercies of David*:—since he had *not suffered his Holy One to see corruption*,—but raised him up to be a Prince and Saviour:—let them learn the faithfulness of God, the certainty of his word, and beware, lest other prophecies should also be accomplished which spoke not of mercy but of judgment.

40. *Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets ;*

41. *Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish : for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.*⁵

That some despisers, some unbelievers were foreseen, was manifest from the tenor of many prophecies. Let those who now received the message of salvation, beware of being those despisers. The

² Heb. x. 13.

³ Gal. ii. 16.

⁴ 1 Rom. iii. 22.

⁵ Isa. xxix. 14. Hab. i. 5.

words of promise had been fulfilled : so likewise would the threatenings of vengeance be verified, if they should “cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despise the word of the Holy One of Israel.” ⁶

LECTURE XLI.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED BY PAUL AND BARNABAS IS RECEIVED BY THE GENTILES AT ANTIOCH, AND OPPOSED BY THE JEWS.—A. D. 45.

ACTS xiii. 42—47.

42. *And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.*

43. *Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas : who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.*

The time had not yet come, when these converts could know the real nature of the course on which they were entering. Like persons setting out for a distant country, and filled with lively hope, for a while their new prospects would sustain them, and as the Ethiopian baptized by Philip, they would “go on their way rejoicing.” But there is still a malicious adversary, seeking whom he may per-

⁶ Isa. v. 24.

vert: there is still a tempting world; there is a deceitful heart, and dangerous friends, and habits long indulged, and passions which may slumber for a while, and yet revive. To his own disciples, the Lord had said; “Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea is now come, when ye shall be scattered, every man to his own.”³

All this was well known to Paul and Barnabas; who therefore exhorted and warned them, and *persuaded them to continue in the grace of God*. Not to be disheartened by the opposition which awaited them, the trials they must encounter from a corrupt nature in a sinful world. “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” He who had opened that kingdom to them, had set the example, as he had also given the warning: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

44. *And the next sabbath-day came almost the whole city together, to hear the word of God.*

Here then was an accomplishment of the many prophecies, which had spoken of a light issuing from Jerusalem, of a salvation which her sons should bring; and of a multitude which should embrace the blessings offered them. (Mic. iv. 1.) “In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills;—and people shall flow unto

³ John xvi. 31.

it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob : and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths : for the law shall go forth of Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” So likewise Isaiah, in his prophetic strain, had foreshown the glory of Jerusalem : and as if beholding the dawn from afar, had said, (lx. 1.) Arise, shine, for thy light is come ; and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

When those who were really looking for the fulfilment of the promises, as Zacharias, and Simeon, and Anna, were made acquainted with the birth of the infant Saviour, they all with one accord exclaimed, Now has “the Lord remembered his holy covenant, and raised up a horn of salvation for us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers.”² In like manner when the Jews at Antioch saw *almost the whole city coming together to hear the word of God*, we might expect them to unite in saying, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel ! The day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death.”³ Now we understand what the prophets foretold, which are read in our synagogues every sabbath day. “Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows ?”⁴

² See Luke i. 68—80 ; ii. 25—38.

³ Luke i. 68—79.

⁴ Is. lx. 8.

They are flocking to verify the promise, “The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.”⁵

Alas! A very different spirit prevailed among the Jewish body.

45. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

46. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

*47. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.*⁶

In the counsels of God it was necessary that the gospel should be preached “to the Jew first, and afterward to the Gentile.” It was not until after the invitation had been issued to the regular guests, that messengers were sent to the highways and hedges, and the mixed multitude gathered in. The “calling of God is without repentance,” and Israel was his chosen people: “at Salem was his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Sion.”

Now, however, the light was come, and the glory of God had risen at Jerusalem. But Jerusalem herself refused to “arise and shine.”⁷ Her people preferred the “gross darkness” by which they were covered, to the light which had come into

⁵ Is. lx. 5; foreign nations in abundance, visited by sea.

⁶ Is. xlix. 6.

⁷ Is. lx. ut supra.

the world. They rejected their own mercy : and they to whom the offer was first made, *put it from them, and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life* : leaving an example to all future ages, lest they also perish “through an evil heart of unbelief.”⁸

Unworthy of everlasting life, we must all continue to the end. “We do not presume to come before God, trusting in our own righteousness, but in his manifold and great mercies.” But God counts as worthiness, a thankful acceptance of his mercy, a lively faith in his promises : a willing movement of the heart towards Him, whom he himself has made “the Lord our righteousness.” The unworthiness of these persons, was the unworthiness of those who “profess to know God, but in their works deny him :” “who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ;” these had no charms for them : they had nothing in common with such things. Therefore they must “eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices :” “for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.”⁹

⁸ Heb. iii. 12.

⁹ Prov. i. 31, 29.

LECTURE XLII.

A COMPANY OF BELIEVERS FORMED AT ANTIOCH.
THE APOSTLES ARE DRIVEN FROM THE NEIGH-
BOURHOOD.—A. D. 45.

ACTS xiii. 48—52.

48. *And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord : and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*

49. *And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.*

The Lord Jesus had affirmed that “no man can come unto him, unless the Father draw him :” and had also said, “All that the Father giveth me, shall come unto me.”⁴

Here were those manifestly drawn of the Father. They had followed Paul and Barnabas ; and after hearing them, had desired that their doctrines might be more fully explained. Of these hearers some probably had dropped off, not persuaded *to continue in the grace of God*. Others were glad, and embraced the faith, and *glorified the word of the Lord*.

⁴ John vi. 44. Ibid. 37.

Seeing this, and well knowing that it could not be except through the power of the Holy Ghost, St. Luke speaks of them in an unusual phrase, *As many as were ordained to eternal life believed*. The same words had been addressed to all. All had heard the same assurance: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this Jesus is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." But one party, from the first, had heard these words with indifference, and then with opposition and enmity. The others, meanwhile, had shown, first, interest, then earnestness, then thankful joy: readiness of mind to hear, and humbleness of heart to receive the gospel. Such a spirit can be given of God alone: and when he saw it given, the writer at once refers it to God's will and pleasure, who "had not appointed them to wrath, but to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ."²

Look now on the other side; on those who did not believe; and therefore were not *ordained to eternal life*. When they saw the multitude, they were filled with envy, and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. This was their exclusion. There was indeed a difference, a separation; but they made it for themselves. The door was not

² See 1 Thess. v. 9. Much has been written concerning the word *τεταγμενοι*, ordained, as signifying those prepared, set in order, disposed. Here, however, is an ambiguity. We shall not rightly interpret the phrase, unless we bear in mind that the word can never describe men as prepared, set in order, or disposed for anything *of themselves*.

shut against them, but they closed the door of their own hearts. God did not set up a light for the Gentiles, and strike the Jews with blindness. Their own evil passions, their envy, their prejudice, their national pride, kept their hearts closed, and acted as a veil before their minds, that seeing they should not see, and hearing they should not understand.

Meanwhile, the whole is according to divine appointment.³ It is God's appointment, that such a state of mind as was shown by the Jews of Antioch, should be hardened into unbelief. And it is equally his appointment, that the sheep who hear the voice of the true shepherd, and follow him, are *ordained to eternal life*: and "they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of his hand."⁴

We see, in what follows, the temper of that party which had counted themselves unworthy of eternal life.

50. *But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.*

51. *But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came into Iconium.*

52. *And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.*

Here was a fulfilment of our Lord's words: (Luke xii. 51 :) "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division." As at Iconium, afterwards, "the whole

³ See 1 Peter ii. 8.

⁴ John x. 27.

city was divided.”⁵ On the one side, were those who published the word of the Lord, and those who with joy received it. On the other hand were those who opposed the word, “contradicting and blaspheming.” And these made a party to their support; stirred up men of influence and women of respectable condition, and persuaded them that the preachers of these new truths were dangerous persons, innovators, disturbers of the peace of families, who could not be too soon forced to leave the place where they were causing so much disquiet.

The apostles obeyed their Lord’s injunction. Being “persecuted in one city,” they “fled into another.”⁶ But first they protested against those who *raised the persecution, and expelled them out of their coasts. They shook off the dust of their feet against them*: as much as to say, that they considered them as heathens, though calling themselves Jews, and the land on which they trode as polluted ground.

Meanwhile the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. How different a state of mind from that of their adversaries. These were full of envy, of hatred, of violence. The others were rejoicing that the word of the Lord was published everywhere, and though rejected by many, was embraced by many. And the comfort which they possessed within had more power to cheer than outward hindrances to disturb. Like the

⁵ Ch. xiv. 4.

⁶ Matt. x. 23.

Thessalonians afterwards, they had “received the word in much affliction.”⁷ But this affliction was accompanied “with joy of the Holy Ghost.” And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is a balm for all wounds. There is that peace which worldly circumstances may increase, but cannot give : may assail, but cannot take away.

LECTURE XLIII.

PAUL AND BARNABAS AT ICONIUM.—A. D. 46.

Acts xiv. 1—7.

1. *And it came to pass in Iconium,¹ that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks, believed.*

Here we find classed together, and assembled together, and addressed together, and converted together, both Jews and Gentiles.

It is difficult to bring ourselves to understand how new and strange this was. St. Paul often alludes to it in his epistles. As writing to the Ephesians, (ii. 11—17,) “Remember that ye being

⁷ 1 Thess. i. 6.

¹ Iconium was a city of Lycaonia, which was a province of Asia Minor.

in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made with hands ; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Such, for the most part, we must believe, was the character of these Greeks at Iconium. And to them, as to the Ephesians, it might be said, “ Now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both (Jews and Gentiles) one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us : and came and preached peace to you which were far off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

Such was the tenor of the message brought by the apostles. It approved itself to the conscience of these Gentiles. The claim of God to their allegiance ; that they could not deny : the Creator has a right over his creatures. The excellence of his law ; this their reason must acknowledge to be “ holy, just, and good.” The mercy of that message by which he now appealed to them ; as a Father who would be reconciled to his children, whether “ nigh” by profession, or “ far off” in total ignorance of his name ; and, above all, “ the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,” who, while they were yet sinners, gave himself for them, that he

might bring them to God ;—these were such words as Barnabas and Paul *so spake that a multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.* “The Lord opened their hearts,” and “his word did not return unto him void.”

Meanwhile the adversary was not idle. If God had a people in Iconium, so also had Satan. And these must be roused to oppose the progress of the gospel.

2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

So just was the Lord's condemnation of the spirit too common amongst the Jews. “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” Far from delighting at the prospect, that now both Jews and Gentiles “had access by one Spirit unto the Father ;” they raised suspicions and jealousies, and endeavoured to turn aside the people from the faith. And there is much, too much, in the natural man which would favour their bad object. They would represent the piety and holiness required by the gospel, as a yoke heavier than could be borne. As the apostles would urge, “We seek not yours, but you ;”³ the enemy would insinuate that they had private ends to serve ; and sought not their souls but their possessions. They would allege the example of Jerusalem, in rejecting, nay, crucifying

² Matt. xxiii. 13.

³ 2 Cor. xii. 14.

him, whom the apostles now proclaimed as “a Prince and a Saviour:” and would ask, “Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?”⁴

Thus was it too easy to stir up adverse feelings among the Gentiles, *and make their minds evil affected against the brethren*. This, however, did not discourage the apostles. They still saw enough of God’s support and favour to detain them. There were many to whom their doctrine came “not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost.”

3. *Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.*

4. *But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.*

5. *And when there was an assault made, both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,*

6. *They were aware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:*

7. *And there they preached the gospel.*

With the power of working miracles, was also given the wisdom of knowing the time to work them. Elymas was struck with blindness at Paphos, because he sought to “pervert the right ways of the Lord.” No divine aid was called in, to restrain the persecutors at Antioch or Iconium. But when an assault was made against the apostles, *to use them despitefully, and to stone them*, they used

⁴ John vii. 48.

it as an intimation from God, that they should carry their glad tidings elsewhere. *They were aware of it*, and fled into Lycaonia, a neighbouring region : and there, unwearied and undaunted, *they preached the gospel*. Thus proving that their purpose was to “commend themselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God ;” to oppose the superstitions of the Gentiles and the prejudices of their Jewish countrymen in no other spirit than that of meekness, and with no other weapons than those of truth and soberness.

At the close of his life, after a lapse of twenty years, Paul looks back upon those days of trial, and recurs to them in his letter to Timothy (2 Tim. iii. 10—13) as an example of what the faithful servants of Christ must often expect, and always be prepared to undergo. “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra : what persecutions I endured : but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” Still they shall receive abundant recompense. According to the Lord’s promise, their recompense shall be “an hundred fold in this present time, with persecutions : and in the world to come eternal life.” Therefore he encourages this his “son in the faith,” by his own example and experience, to “endure afflictions,” to be “partaker of the afflictions of the gospel :” knowing that “to him that overcometh,” to him that “endureth

temptation,"¹ it is given to sit with Christ upon his throne of glory.

LECTURE XLIV.

PAUL'S ADDRESS TO THE IDOLATERS AT LYSTRA, WHO WOULD HAVE WORSHIPPED HIM AND BARNABAS.—A. D. 46.

ACTS xiv. 8—18.

8. *And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked :*

9. *The same heard Paul speak : who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiring that he had faith to be healed,*

10. *Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet : and he leaped and walked.*

Among the gifts bestowed upon the apostles was the power of discerning character. It had enabled Peter to discover the evil which lurked in the heart of Ananias. It now enabled Paul to perceive the grace which had reached this cripple, while hearing the words of life, and had given him *faith to be healed*. Like his divine Master, he was ready to perform a deed of mercy ; and astonished the beholders by bestowing on this decrepit man a power which till then he had never known.

¹ Matt. x. 30. 2 Tim. iv. 5, and 1, 8.

11. *And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.*

12. *And they called Barnabas Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.*

13. *Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.*

On a like occasion, many years before, Peter had been forced to remonstrate even with his countrymen, and to say, “Ye men of Israel, why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?”¹ The idolaters at Lystra saw the apostles’ power, but could not yet know whose instruments they were, or in what name they had done this deed. So they gave them titles belonging to the deities which they were used to worship, and prepared to pay them divine honours: *would have done sacrifice with the people.*

This had the same effect on Paul and Barnabas as if a parent had been grievously insulted, or one dearest to them had been placed in sudden jeopardy. The worship was offered to themselves, which was due to the God whom they loved, and revered, and served.

14. *Which when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,*

15. *And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto*

¹ Ch. iii. 12.

you, that ye should turn from these vanities, unto the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein :

16. *Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.*

17. *Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.*

18. *And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.*

The glory of God was the great object of the apostles. For themselves they sought neither wealth nor honour : but seize the occasion to bring these ignorant heathens to the knowledge of the one true God, by an argument arising out of the miracle they had seen.

Paul had bestowed strength on one who before was lame and impotent. They had been astonished at this instance of power, saw that it was not of human nature, and exclaimed that *the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men.*

So far they reasoned justly, and when they saw the possession of extraordinary power, they referred it to an extraordinary cause.

But the far more astonishing power and goodness which is exercised in the ordinary course of God's providence had never so struck them, as to raise their minds towards the source from which it came. *He left not himself without witness, in that he gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.* Yet they were content to "form a god, to make a graven image which is profitable for nothing ;" to fall down and

worship “the figure of a man;” and it never came into their minds to say, “is there not a lie in my right hand?”² This could only be, “because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, and therefore he gave them over to a reprobate mind,”³ and *suffered them to walk in their own unhappy ways.*

Even now, the natural heart does not incline towards God, but rather turns away from him, disclosed as he is to us by the light of his revealed word. We receive his bounties; we are willing to rely upon his providence; but where is the love, the fear, the reverence, the obedience which he demands? Men do not worship graven images, or make to themselves gods in the likeness of men: their vanities are not the vanities of the people of Lystra. But too often they serve and obey *the living God* as little as those heathen. They too “feed on ashes:” and they make no return to Him who *does us good, and fills our hearts with food and gladness*: “in whom we live and move and have our being.”

The same gospel which Paul was preaching, must still produce, for it alone does produce, the effect which he desired. We have still constant proof that in any true or real sense there is no access to *the living God, which made heaven and earth*, except through “Jesus Christ whom he hath sent:” and that “no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”⁴

² See Is. xlv. 11—20.

³ Rom. i. 28.

⁴ Matt. xi. 27.

LECTURE XLV.

PAUL'S DANGER AT LYSTRA.—THE DISCIPLES
CONFIRMED IN THE FAITH.—A. D. 46.

ACTS xiv. 19—22.

19. *And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.*

“Once was I stoned,” says St. Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians, alluding to this occasion.¹ He speaks of “perils from his own countrymen, and perils from the heathen.” Here both were united. The fickle multitude at Lystra, who but lately “were scarce restrained that they had not done sacrifice” to Paul and Barnabas, now joined with the Jews to stone him.

Perhaps we wonder how they could be persuaded to this. But it is easy to persuade the ignorant. The people had seen an exercise of power, and been astonished. But their hearts had not been touched: no moral change had been produced. And they would as readily believe that the miracle was wrought through the influence of evil spirits, or that some magical art had been exercised upon the cripple, as that “the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men.”

¹ Ch. xi. 25.

So having stoned Paul, they drew him out of the city, supposing that he had been dead. But a stronger hand had preserved him. The death of Stephen was not designed for Paul. Neither was his work yet done.

20. *Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.*

21. *And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,*

22. *Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

We have here a sentence which ought not to be passed lightly over. The apostles evidently are not speaking of one age, or one place, or one set of Christians only; but lay it down as a general rule, that the life of a Christian is not a life of ease or tranquillity, or the way to the kingdom of God a way that has no difficulties or trials. Can it be otherwise? We are corrupt men, in a corrupt world: and through this corruption we must pass to incorruption. There are and always will be *tribulations* which stand between us and the “narrow gate,” which is the entrance of God’s heavenly kingdom.

1. There is, first, the corruption of the heart. A thoughtless, ungodly person has no trouble on this ground, because he permits his evil inclinations to take their own way. But the Christian knows that either he must conquer these, or they

will destroy him. Unless he is led by the Spirit of God, he cannot be a child of God : and if he is led by the Spirit, he will subdue the works of the flesh ; will “ keep under his body, and bring it into subjection.” But this is no easy task. “ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit : and these are contrary the one to the other. There is a law in our members, warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members.” Now this is occasion of frequent grief and disappointment. The man finds that he is not what he wishes to be, what he strives to be, what he ought to be. Sins long mortified, still exist and rebel : proud thoughts, sensual thoughts, covetous thoughts, malicious thoughts, still arise in his mind, and cast a stain upon his humility, his purity, his charity, his brotherly kindness. All this is *tribulation* to him ; that his besetting sin still has so much power, still requires to be kept down with so strong a hand. Surely our Lord’s words will justify us if we call this *tribulation*. For he compares the resisting a temptation to the plucking out a right eye, the overcoming an evil practice to the cutting off a right arm. And if there were any who could not understand this, I should much fear that they scarcely understood themselves. I should much fear that they had not felt the difficulty, because they had not set about the duty. No doubt, the difficulty varies ; and is greatly increased when evil habits have been once indulged : habits are far more obstinate than inclinations : and those are happiest, who soonest begin the work of self-

denial. But begun it must be ; and it must be carried on. Without pains and trouble men can no more conquer the evil which is in their hearts, than without exertion they can swim against a stream. And they must submit to such exertion, they must submit to all the pain and mortification which attend it, if ever they would *enter into the kingdom of God*.

2. Another source of *tribulation* to the pious Christian, arises from the example, the persuasion, the opposition, of the ungodly, who follow ways different from his.

Doubtless the apostles, when they uttered this sentence, were thinking of something more severe : alluded to that open persecution which the early Christians were forced to undergo : to those trials of “heavy mockings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment,” with which God in different ages has permitted the faith of his people to be proved.

We may be thankful that we are exempt from such trials. But the Christian must not expect freedom from all tribulation of this kind. Even in these brighter days, he may find himself beset with sore temptations.

Such is the case with many who desire to be faithful servants of their Lord. Perhaps they are surrounded with scorers and scoffers, who reproach them “for righteousness’ sake :” perhaps they are forced by the business of the world to consort with those who have no care either for their own souls or the souls of others.

Perhaps they are brought into circumstances where they must either offend him whom they are first bound to serve, or displease their nearest earthly friends. Like Paul himself, they must choose whom they will leave: those whom they most love here, or him who has called them to an heavenly inheritance.

Others are so placed, that they must either resign their vocation, and risk the loss of flattering earthly prospects, or else walk inconsistently with their calling as Christians, inconsistently with their character as servants of Christ. Mammon is on one side, and God on the other. And they must determine whom they will serve.

We cannot know what is in the world, without being aware that difficulties of this kind are often thrown in the way of Christians even in these days of outward prosperity of the church. And no one who remembers what human nature is, will deny that there are causes of *tribulation*.

It is therefore a general truth, *that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*. For all this scorn must be encountered, all this bad example resisted, all this self-denial consented to,—or else we shall be found among those who in this world have sought their portion, and in this world had their reward: found among those who in this generation have been “ashamed” of their Lord and his service, and of whom “he will be ashamed” when he comes in glory.

For these reasons might the apostles warn these christian converts, that they should not be dis-

couraged when trials came. As our Lord had himself said, “ These things have I told you, that ye may remember that I told you of them.”² And so we may say in general, that the perfect rest which the gospel promises, is that “ rest which remaineth for the people of God” when they are taken from this present evil world. The rest which it bestows here, is not that sort of rest which consists in tranquillity and uninterrupted ease : but another sort of rest, more suited to a corrupt nature and a state of trial. It is rest from the fear of death ; rest from the terrors of a broken law ; rest from the dread of an offended God : rest from the dominion of sin. There is sufficient comfort in this rest, to compensate for any tribulation. No one who enjoys that comfort, will complain that our blessed Lord fails to make good his promise, that all who come unto him, and take his yoke upon them, shall “ find rest unto their souls.”

LECTURE XLVI.

PAUL AND BARNABAS APPOINT ELDERS FOR
THE DIFFERENT CHURCHES.—A. D. 46.

Acts xiv. 23.

23. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

² John xvi. 4.

When nation rises against nation, and a country is overrun and conquered by a successful enemy, the victorious commander passes through it, inspects the fortresses, instructs and encourages those who garrison them, and puts those officers in charge who are most able to maintain discipline and secure fidelity. Of a like nature was the journey in which Paul and Barnabas were engaged, though they brought peace and not war, and though the kingdom which they were establishing was “not of this world.” They had disturbed the reign of Satan and weakened his power in all this district of Asia, and had set up, instead, the gospel of Christ. And now they visit the principal places where christian companies had been formed, acquaint them with the will of their sovereign more perfectly, and *ordain in every church* those best suited for the purpose, who might instruct, rebuke, exhort with all authority.

These were called *elders*. It was a term familiar to the Jews, who had been accustomed to rulers and elders of the congregation.² In every company of believers, some would be more fit than others for such an office ; would have more talent, more knowledge, more zeal, more opportunity of applying themselves to the work. And these being selected by those who knew them best, were approved by the apostles, and solemnly appointed

² Exod. xvi. 22 ; xvii. 5. Numb. xi. 16. Deut. xxxi. 28. Hammond is very full on this point.

to their office with fasting and prayer.³ They were, in fact, pastors of their respective flocks. They were those whom fourteen years afterwards Paul summoned from Ephesus and other neighbouring churches to Miletus, and exhorted with so much earnestness and warmth, that they would “take heed to the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers, to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.” They were those, concerning whom Paul afterwards gave directions to Timothy and Titus;⁴ that they should commit to other “faithful men” the truths which they had themselves received: being at the same time careful to “lay hands suddenly on no man,” but to select those who were blameless, apt to teach, patient, lovers of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word, as they had been taught, that they might be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the “gainsayers.”⁵

Then, further, they are those concerning whom the apostle gives injunction to the different churches, that “the elders which rule well should be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who la-

³ So Clement, 1st Ep. states, that the apostles, as they carried the gospel through regions or cities, established their first fruits, (earliest and best converts,) as bishops, (*i. e.* elders,) and deacons of those who should afterwards believe. Sometimes one, sometimes more than one, was appointed to each congregation.

⁴ Ch. xx. 28. See also 1 Pet. v. 1—7.

⁵ Tit. i. 5—9. 1 Tim. iii. 2—4.

hour in the word and doctrine.”⁶ So he exhorts the Hebrews, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief.”⁷

Such was the first establishment of the christian church, as it exists, in substance, to this day, in all countries where the faith of Christ is professed as the religion of the land. The charge of a collected company whose abodes conveniently adjoined each other⁸ was assigned to elders or presbyters, one or more, who were overseers of that particular flock or fold. These, as we saw, were *ordained*, appointed, by the apostles; and they had deacons to assist them in their charge.⁹ When the increase of the church throughout the world, and the decrease in the number of the apostles as they gradually were called to their rest, made it impracticable that they should superintend the whole, they commissioned others who might first relieve, and then succeed them. Such was Titus in Crete, and Timothy at Ephesus.¹ “For this cause,” says Paul to Titus (i. 5.) “left I thee in Crete, that thou

⁶ 1 Tim. v. 17.

⁷ 1 Tim. xiii. 17.

⁸ *παρῳκοι*, as in our parishes

⁹ 1 Tim. iii. 12, &c.

¹ After a while, the title of *overseer*, or bishop, was confined to these. Originally, there was no distinction. A bishop was a presbyter, and a presbyter was a bishop. This appears in the passage cited in the text. St. Paul instructs Titus to *ordain elders in every city*, and then proceeds, in the next line, to describe these *elders* under the name of *bishop*. As likewise in

shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." And so he writes to Timothy, (i. 1. 3,) "I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine; neither give heed to fables."

Such was the form which the church assumed, as it prevailed and grew. In this form we find it throughout its history, as superintended by bishops, and instructed by presbyters or elders, with deacons to assist them.

How wonderful the change! "The world had not known God."² The few who sought after him "if haply they might find him,"³ had no certain clue, still less any authorised guide. Now provision is made, that none should be "strangers to the covenant of promise, without hope, and without God in the world."⁴ A light was raised, and conspicuously set up, and transmitted from hand to hand, and from age to age, which "should light every man that cometh into the world." The young, on first entering it, might be dedicated to

1 Timothy iii. 1. Again, in Acts xx., those elders summoned to Miletus are termed indifferently *πρεσβυτεροι* or *ἐπισκοποι*. Compare v. 17 and 28. This confusion would have been inconvenient, when one of the elders was made superintendent, and had pre-eminence. Then he became *the* overseer; that is, the bishop. Accordingly, the history of every church contains a catalogue of its bishops. In this Antioch, for example, Evodius is reckoned first, Ignatius second.

² 1 Cor. i. 21.

³ Ch. xvii. 27.

⁴ Eph. ii. 12.

their Creator. Christ had ordered that they should be brought unto him. Every age, every condition of life might "walk with God;" "set him always before them." The rich might become rich indeed; no longer "having their portion in this world" alone. And with the rich "the poor met together;" equal in the sight of "the Saviour of all men." It was the character of his religion, that "the poor had the gospel preached unto them." An order of persons was set apart who should instruct the young, inform the ignorant, warn the thoughtless, reclaim the wandering, comfort the distressed, edify the whole, dispensing to each his portion in due season. Thus a people might be trained on earth, who should hereafter be raised to an everlasting kingdom in heaven. And the motto of the church, of the whole church, and of every division of it, was this: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." He will have "all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." "Let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."⁵

⁵ 2 Cor. v. 19. 1 Tim. ii. 3. Rev. xxii. 17.

LECTURE XLVII.

THE RETURN OF PAUL AND BARNABAS TO ANTIOCH, AFTER VISITING THE CHURCHES.—A. D. 46.

ACTS xiv. 24—28.

24. *And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.*

25. *And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia :¹*

26. *And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.*

Setting out on their mission more than a year before from this place, they had been solemnly *recommended to the grace of God*. The prophets and teachers who were of the church of Antioch, after fasting and prayer, had “laid their hands upon them and sent them away.”² But the grace of God had been granted to their prayer, and had blessed their journey to an extent to which their hopes could scarcely have been raised. They could hardly have expected that in Cyprus, where their work began, the first fruits of their ministry should be the Roman governor, the chief person of the

¹ Both towns of Pamphylia: Attalia, a sea port, now called Sattalia. Hence back to the *Syrian* Antioch.

² Chapter xiii. 3.

island. They could hardly have expected that in Pisidia, when the name of Jesus was proclaimed to a mixed assembly of Jews and Gentiles, the Gentiles should be the first to entreat that they might hear more of the word of this salvation : that they especially should “ be glad, and glorify the word of the Lord.”³ They had set out, trusting in God, and not counting their lives dear unto themselves. But now their trust had become confidence, and their hope experience. He had not only supported them when opposed by Elymas, or delivered them from death at Lystra ; but he had brought strength out of their weakness, and allowed them to be the first who should illustrate his parable, (Mark iv. 26,) “ So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground ; and should sleep, and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.”

These were the glad tidings with which they now returned : and we may well conceive the interest with which their report would be listened to by the Christians at Antioch.

27. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

28. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

They reported nothing of themselves, except as instruments in God’s hands : it is not what *they had done*, how successful they had been,

³ Chap. xiii. 48.

but what *God had done with them* :⁴ how he had *opened a door of faith*, to those against whom before the door was shut : he had held up a light to the Gentiles, and had opened their eyes to see it, and their hearts to be guided by it into the way everlasting.”

It was indeed a mystery, “that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ by the gospel : a mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it was now revealed unto the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.”⁵ But though their eyes had been holden, that they should not perceive this ; it was the will of God from the beginning, “according to his good pleasure which he had purposed in himself,”⁶ “that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ :” “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁷ He had clearly foretold this : saying, by the mouth of Isaiah, (lxvi. 18—21,) “It shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations ;” those that escape “from the untoward generation”⁸ to which they belong, shall be my messengers to all quarters of the earth ; “to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow”—(to Africa and Lydia)—“to

⁴ Μετ’ αὐτῶν, as also Ch. xv. 4.

⁵ Eph. iii. 5, 6. See also Col. i. 26.

⁶ Eph. i. 9, 10.

⁷ Eph. iii. 11.

⁸ See ch. ii. 40.

Tubal, and Java, and the isles afar off”—(to Italy and Greece)—“that have not heard my fame, nor seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren”—(your brethren then, inasmuch as they are made partakers of the covenant, children of God by adoption)—“for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations. And I will also take of them for priests and Levites, saith the Lord.”

Not a word of this, might the apostles say, has fallen to the ground. We set out from you; and we have been to distant isles, and distant lands, where the true God was no more known than among yourselves three years ago; where, instead of Him, they were ready to worship us his messengers, “men of like passions with themselves.” To these we have *declared his glory*. And many of them have become *an offering unto the Lord*: they have presented themselves “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, to the Lord: a reasonable service,” instead of senseless vanity. And of these, some have been *taken as priests and Levites*; we have *ordained them elders in every church*, God having put grace into their hearts first to learn, and then to teach: so to receive in their own souls the “water of life,” that they are able to lead others to the same “wells of salvation.” Thus is multiplied, as was written, “the seed of David, and the Levites that minister unto God.”⁹

Thus they would delight to compare prophecy with the things which they had seen and heard, and

⁹ Jer. xxxii. 21.

so to bring the “light from a dark place,” and hold it up for the consolation and instruction of the brethren. It would encourage them to look onward towards the fulfilment of that further prophecy, when all the “family in heaven and earth,” which is named after the name of Christ, shall meet in heavenly places, and unite in giving “glory to the God of heaven,” “saying, Amen ; Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever !”¹

LECTURE XLVIII.

A DISPUTE CONCERNING THE LAW OF MOSES
OCCASIONS PAUL AND BARNABAS TO VISIT
JERUSALEM.—A. D. 51.

ACTS xv. 1—4.

1. *And certain men which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*

All was going on favourably at Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas abode long time with the disciples. Meanwhile a question had arisen which threatened much trouble to the christian cause.

The doctrine of the gospel is, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus

¹ Rev. xi. 13. vii. 12.

Christ.” The Gentiles, therefore, who received the gospel and confessed that Jesus was the Christ, were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and were brought into covenant with God. They were thus placed on a level with the Jews. And now some of the Jews began to feel what is described in the Lord’s parable. “These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burthen and heat of the day.”¹ They murmured against this equality, and this neglect of the ordinances of the law: and they asserted that it was necessary for the Gentiles “to be circumcised, and to keep the law of Moses.”

Paul and Barnabas resisted to the utmost this new precept. It was a burthen which these Gentiles might refuse to bear: it was a yoke not lightly to be laid upon them. But still farther, it was a contradiction of the gospel; directly opposed to “the truth as it is in Jesus.”

The christian doctrine is, that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself;” so that “he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life.” This was the message entrusted to the apostles: and the promise was clear, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

But now certain men from Judea interfere, and *teach the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved.*

¹ Matt. xx. 12.

This would nullify the whole purpose of the gospel. They that were under the old covenant must stand or fall by the law of Moses: but they that were under the new, must stand or fall, according as they believed in Him who was “the end of the law for righteousness.”²

With these, we are told, *Paul and Barnabas had no small disputation*. You assert, (they may have argued,) that except a man keep the law, and comply with the rite of circumcision, he cannot be saved. How then, if that be so, can Christ have done all that is necessary to reconcile man to God? How is the sacrifice of Christ complete, if the rite of circumcision must be added to it? Our doctrine is, “that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”³ This is our doctrine. But your doctrine is, that a man is not justified except he obey the ordinances of the law. This is “another gospel:”⁴ this is not the gospel which has been committed to us; nor is it any gospel, any glad tidings at all: for it is to shake the foundations of our trust: to remove us from the rock on which the anchor of our hope is fixed, and to build our house upon the sand. “Behold, I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.”⁵ Christ is become of no effect unto you, “whosoever of you are justified by the law: ye are fallen from grace.” You no longer receive salvation as the

² Rom. x. 4.

³ Gal. ii. 16.

⁴ Gal. i. 7.

⁵ Gal. v. 2—4.

free “gift of God, through Jesus Christ.” You join the works of the law with his work, in the business of justification. And you bring yourselves under that system by which no man can stand. (Gal. iii. 10—14.) “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ: that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

To this effect, as we learn from the epistles, would be the disputation of Paul and Barnabas. Still the christian congregations desired to know what was thought upon this question at Jerusalem, where resided James, and Peter, and other pillars of the church. It was agreed that inquiry should be made.

2. *When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.*

3. *And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.*

⁶ We learn from Gal. ii. 1, 2, that this visit to Jerusalem was undertaken by divine direction, as well as in accordance with the wish of the church. Titus, it also seems, was one of the party; one of the *certain others*.

4. *And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.*

The assembly at Jerusalem which received the embassy from Antioch, and the persons who formed the deputation, were alike proofs of the grace of God, accomplishing his merciful designs. Here at Jerusalem, where less than twenty years ago Jesus had been put to death, was a large and established body of Christians, who trusted in his atonement, and were living in obedience to his laws. To these came Paul and Barnabas from Antioch. Paul, now the preacher of that faith which for awhile in the very city where he now was, he strained every nerve to destroy. Barnabas, a man of property, who had devoted himself and all he had to the cause of the gospel, and had not repented of his choice;⁷ but was now exhorting all with whom he had intercourse to do the same. These, as they travelled, had been *brought on their way* by numbers of fellow Christians. They had *passed through Phenice and Samaria*, and there had found other christian churches, rejoicing to receive them, and to hear what God had wrought in the country which they had left, in bringing the Gentiles to himself, through the preaching of the gospel. And now when they reached their destination, *and were received of the church and of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem*, they had to declare glad tidings of great joy. They had to tell of the accomplishment of the prophecy, how “the people that walked in

⁷ Chap. iv. 36.

darkness had seen a great light ; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them had the light shined.”⁸ They had to tell of idolaters by birth and habit, who had cast aside their “vanities, and turned to the true and living God.” They had to tell of those who having been long “dead in trespasses and sins, were now quickened to a new life,” “renewed in the spirit of their minds,” walking before God in righteousness and holiness, and waiting for his Son from heaven.

Such were *the things which God had done with them* : had brought to pass through their agency. And now the brethren from Antioch and the brethren of Jerusalem were present together, to “thank the Lord for his goodness,” and to say, “This hath God wrought,” and “it is marvellous in our eyes.” He had fulfilled all that had been foretold. He had “given knowledge of salvation to his people, the Jews, by the remission of their sins.” “He had opened the blind eyes” of the Gentiles, “to bring out the prisoners from the prison.”⁹ We may naturally suppose that the words of Simeon would occur to them, and be better understood, perhaps, than they once had been : “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people : a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”¹

⁸ Is. ix. 20.

⁹ Luke i. 77. Is. xlii. 7.

¹ Luke ii. 29.

LECTURE XLIX.

THE APOSTLES DISCUSS THE QUESTION CONCERNING THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW OF MOSES.—A. D. 51.

ACTS xv. 5—11.

5. *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.*

6. *And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.*

The first salutations were now over on the coming of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, and the surprising intelligence had been communicated, that christian churches were rapidly springing up in heathen Asia. And now the subject must be discussed, which had been the occasion of their journey. Was it needful to bring the Gentiles into covenant with God by the rite of circumcision? Such had been the original ordinance of the Jewish law, for every Jew, and for every stranger.¹ And certain of the sect of the Pharisees, though they had embraced the faith of Christ, maintained that it was needful still. *And this matter the apostles and elders came together to consider.*

7. *And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how*

¹ Exodus xii. 48, &c.

that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8. *And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us ;*

9. *And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

10. *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear ?*

11. *But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.*

Such is the course of reasoning by which Peter meets the question raised here by the Pharisees. There were no words of the Lord Jesus, by which he had positively set aside the law of Moses. He had indeed uttered words which the Pharisees might turn to their own use. He had said, "I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil." He had said, "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."² We know what these assertions mean ; but the Pharisees might naturally employ them to support their own opinion. Peter therefore meets the question upon more general grounds. The Pharisees said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." He answered : You argue that conformity to the law of Moses is needful, in order that a man be saved ; be accepted of God. But a man who is not accepted of God, cannot have the special and best gifts of God. These men have the special

² Matt. v. 17, 18.

and best gifts of God. *God who knoweth the heart, bare them witness:* testified that he received the Gentiles who repented, and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. *He bare them witness, and put no difference between us and them, giving them the Holy Ghost, and purifying their hearts by faith.* If they could not be saved, if he had not “appointed them to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ,”³ they could not have enjoyed that which was the special purchase of his death: that Holy Ghost, whom, when he ascended, he promised to send down upon his disciples, that He might abide with them for ever, to comfort, to strengthen, to direct them. If they had not been justified, they would not have been sanctified. But he who *purified their hearts by faith*, showed that they were justified in his sight: had inherited that promise of the Lord, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

Plainly, therefore, might it be seen that nothing more was needful to them, though they were not circumcised, and did not observe the law of Moses. There was clear proof that the kingdom of heaven was open to them, because God had admitted them to a preparation for that kingdom. And if this was evident, let them beware how they disturbed a work which God had wrought, or closed a door which he had opened. The law was burthensome even to the Jews who had been brought up in it. Placed on the neck of the Gentile converts, it would prove an intolerable yoke. Why should they be

³ 1 Thess. v. 9.

forced to comply with that, which, after all, could do nothing towards their salvation ; which was but a course of discipline to bring men to the real grounds of acceptance with God ? For even we who have kept the law, do not any longer look to that for salvation ; but to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “ the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”⁴ *We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even as they.*

So the apostle Peter dealt with this question ; and his mode of treating it, has rendered the subject profitable to every age.

No one would now contend, that “ except a man keep the law of Moses he cannot be saved.” But it is a question which personally concerns every one, whether he shall be himself saved : whether he has an interest in the covenant of grace, is within the number of the chosen. Peter here instructs us where to look for the answer ; viz. to the heart, whether it is purified by faith, to the practice, whether it is governed by the Holy Spirit. *God has given to the Gentiles the Holy Ghost*—so the apostle argues—*even as he did unto us.* He will not cast off those, whom he has made a holy temple to himself. He has *purified their hearts by faith.* They need no further qualification. He who is *saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,* is purified through the faith which he holds.

⁴ Rom. x. 4.

For there is that in faith, which purifies ; which leads to sanctification. It shows the consequence of sin, eternal death. It shows the vastness of the inheritance, eternal life. And thus it makes sin hateful ; a thing to be dreaded and resisted ; and raises the affections from things below to things above. If it does not this, it is not the faith which saves. It is not justifying faith, if it is not sanctifying faith. But God justifies those whom the Holy Spirit sanctifies ; and to this inherent test we must look, far more than to any outward distinction or ordinance, when the question is asked, Who shall be saved ?

O for higher measures of that faith ! That faith which sets Christ crucified before us ; crucified that he might make atonement for transgression ! That faith that sets before us the same Mediator interceding for our sins, negligences, and ignorances ! That faith which shows that any trials, any sacrifices, any mortifications which we must submit to here, are “ not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.” Such is the faith which cleanses the heart from corrupt works “ to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.” And living and dying in this faith, *we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they* who met in the assembly at Jerusalem, and were the first fruits of the gospel of Christ.

LECTURE L.

THE DECREE OF THE COUNCIL IS GIVEN BY
JAMES, CONCERNING THE LAW OF MOSES.—

A. D. 51.

ACTS xv. 12—21.

12. *Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.*

Tidings had before been brought to Jerusalem, that “God had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life.” In the eleventh chapter we had the account of the surprise which Peter occasioned by the intelligence which he brought back from Joppa. But now the work had proceeded much further. Cornelius, though a Gentile, had renounced idolatry before he embraced the gospel. The report which Paul and Barnabas could relate, would tell of far greater *miracles and wonders*. The prophet had asked, “Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods?”¹ Now, nations had done this: had “cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which their own hands had made unto them for sin.”² Now, they who had lived “without God in the world,” “unto every good work reprobate,” had been quickened into spiritual life; had

¹ Jer. ii. 11.

² Is. xxxi. 7.

been “sanctified, had been justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God.” This the apostles who had witnessed it now declared, confirming the argument of Peter, that God had shown his favour towards them, *purifying their hearts by faith.*

And now James, as chief leader of the church at Jerusalem, confirms the opinion which Peter had declared, and settles it by a formal decree.

13. *And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me :*

14. *Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.*³

15. *And to this agree the words of the prophets ; as it is written,*

16. *After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down ; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up :*

17. *That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.*⁴

18. *Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world.*

These words of James explain to us the reasoning by which he was led to the decision which he afterwards declares.

Simeon, he says, (Simon Peter,) has reminded you how God ten years ago selected him to be the first who should make known the gospel to a heathen company. That company heard and believed. God thus showed his design to *visit the Gentiles, and take out of them a people for his name.*

³ Ch. x.

⁴ Amos ix. 11, 12.

We were surprised at this : Peter himself was astonished, and was only convinced by signs and proofs, to withstand which would be to “ withstand God.” ⁵

And yet we may perceive that such was the divine intimation from the beginning. For *to this agree the words of the prophets* ; speaking of a time when God should repair what had fallen, and restore what had been destroyed, *that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles after whom my name is called.*

This then is “ the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God,” “ according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus,” “ that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” ⁶ For *known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.* His counsels are fixed from everlasting.

Upon which he concludes,

19. *Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God :*

20. *But that we write unto them, that they abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*

21. *For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath-day.*

Such was James’s decision, and the reasoning on which it was founded. The question had been,

⁵ Ch. xi. 2, 16, 17.

⁶ Eph. iii. 6—9.

whether the Gentiles should be circumcised, and made obedient to the law of Moses, which required numerous purifications, abstinence from certain meats, and other burdensome ceremonies.

Certainly they should not be circumcised. Circumcision was the entrance into the Jewish covenant. The time was now come when the promise should be fulfilled, “Behold, saith the Lord, I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah.”⁷ Into this new covenant baptism was the entrance, before which the old was “ready to vanish away.”

But let them remember “the will of God, which was their sanctification.” God “had called them to holiness.” Practices which in their heathen state they had considered lawful, were abominable in the sight of God, and must be utterly renounced and abandoned: “for on account of these things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience.”

Let them abstain, too, *from pollutions of idols*: from partaking of meats offered to idols. “For the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils and not to God:”⁸ and the Christian should keep as far as possible from all such defilement of wickedness.

Let them also abstain *from things strangled, and from blood*. *Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath-day*. This law is honoured by many, and has a just claim to honour. And in that law

⁷ Jer. xxxi. 31.

⁸ 1 Cor. x. 20.

it is written, "Flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." "Be sure that thou eat not the blood; for the blood is the life; and thou must not eat the life with the flesh."⁹ It may be that this, too, like other ceremonial ordinances which have kept us a separate people, is "decaying and waxing old." But to the Jews who have been brought up under such a rule, to eat of things from which the blood had not been poured out, would be abomination.¹ And let not the Gentile grieve his brother. He may be persuaded that "there is nothing unclean of itself," and that the law has no longer force, which made certain meats unclean. But his Jewish brother is not so persuaded. And it is good for the Gentiles to walk charitably, and "neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby his brother stumbleth or is offended."²

Such was the decree of this council. We perceive in it "the inspiration of the Almighty;" guiding the apostles into all truth, and leading them safely through the difficulties which on either side endangered them. It was, at the same time, wisdom to require nothing as contributing to salvation which Christ had not required: and it was charity to conciliate and unite those, whom early prejudices had placed in opposition to each other. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any-

⁹ Gen. ix. 4. Deut. xii. 23.

¹ Lev. iv. 13.

² Rom. xiv. 20. See also the whole chapter, together with 1 Cor. viii. throughout.

thing, nor uncircumcision : but faith which worketh by love.”³ The important precept was observed, “Give none offence, neither to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.” “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”⁴

LECTURE LI.

THE DECREE OF THE COUNCIL SENT TO ANTIOCH.—A. D. 52.

ACTS xv. 22—31.

22. *Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas surnamed Barnabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren :*

23. *And they wrote letters by them after this manner : The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia :*

24. *Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls : saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law : to whom we gave no such commandment :*

25. *It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you, with our beloved Barnabas and Paul ;*

³ Gal. v. 6.

⁴ 1 Cor. x. 32. Rom. xiv. 50.

26. *Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In the whole of this affair we perceive, on one side, the subtlety of a malicious adversary : on the other, a divine power, frustrating his snares. Satan would “deceive, if it were possible, the very elect.”¹ But lo, “I am with you always.”

May not, then, that reverence for the law of Moses have been sincere, which had occasioned the perplexity? The words of the decree prove the contrary. The attempt was the commencement of that opposition to the true doctrine of Christ which confronted the apostles everywhere, and made their countrymen more dangerous to them than the heathen. *Certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised and keep the law : to whom we gave no such commandment.* And this agrees with St. Paul’s account, Gal. ii. 4 : when he speaks of “certain false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.”

It was, therefore, really opposition to the gospel, though covered under a specious pretext. It was the enemy scattering tares, where the husbandman had sowed good seed in the field.

But if there was the subtlety of Satan on the one side, on the other was the wisdom of the Spirit. No difference of opinion remained among the mem-

¹ See Matt. xxiv. 24.

bers of the council. But they would not send back Paul and Barnabas alone. These might be supposed to feel a bias towards the judgment which they had all along declared. *It seemed good to send with them chosen men, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.* And yet they remind the Christians, what reason they had for trusting Barnabas and Saul, *men who have hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.* Men, against whom many adversaries had stood up, and against whom, probably, many hard words had been spoken in the course of their disputation. Yet were they men, who had been in labours most abundant, and in peril above measure: who had been the first to confront heathen idolatry, and assail Satan in his strongest holds. Receive such; count such worthy of double honour.

27. *We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.*

28. *For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;*

29. *That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.*

30. *So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:*

31. *Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.*

Justly might they call it, *consolation.* In the gospel, they had a clear direction, a certain rule.

“ Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “ There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” “ God hath made him to us, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Then came in the “ false brethren,” and say, “ Except ye be circumcised and keep the law, ye cannot be saved.” To what then were they to look? No longer to Christ, as being “ the end of the law for righteousness ;” but to circumcision and outward ordinances. This was to *subvert their souls*:² to take away that provision and supply of all that is necessary to salvation which the gospel so amply furnishes. And in this way Paul treats the case, when others were afterwards running into a like error. (Gal. vii. 1.) “ O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” You, to whom it hath been so clearly shown that Jesus Christ has made a complete atonement on the cross for the sins of all men; you that have been used to look up to this, as your hope and confidence;—would you now turn aside from this ground on which you stood, and seek a new foundation for God’s favour? This would be indeed the subversion of your souls. “ Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” “ For his yoke is easy, and his burthen is light.”³

² ἀνασκευάζοντες, v. 24.

³ Gal. v. 1. Matt. xi. 31.

For what reason may we believe that this dispute is so fully discussed, and left for our instruction in these latter days? That we too may *rejoice for the consolation* of knowing the ground on which we rest. To unite anything with the merits of Christ, as assisting in reconciling us to God and giving us peace with him, would be to subvert our souls as well as theirs. There is indeed a great difference, in themselves, between the works of the Mosaic law, and the “good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”⁴ But there is no difference in the place which they hold as justifying us in God’s sight. We are justified, not because we “live righteously, soberly, and godly;” but because, “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” We walk religiously in good works, not that we may be justified by these; for [our justification is not of ourselves, but of Christ: but because we are justified, we “walk nor after the flesh but after the Spirit.” The Christians of Antioch might not rest on circumcision, as a ground on which they should be saved. And we must not appeal to our pure, and meek, and just, and charitable practice, for any other purpose than to show that “the life which we live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God.”⁵ “By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” alone do “we hope to be saved, even as they.”

⁴ Eph. ii. 10.

⁵ Gal. ii. 20.

LECTURE LII.

PAUL AND BARNABAS LEAVE ANTIOCH ON A
VISIT TO THE CHURCHES.—A. D. 53.

ACTS xv. 32—41.

32. *And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves,¹ exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.*

33. *And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.*

These good men, Judas and Silas, could not visit this flourishing church of God, without dropping the word of instruction and exhortation. Truth is thus established out of the mouth of many concurring witnesses. The people too would see that if their own teachers were urgent with them, so also were others: others as well as their own “fathers in Christ” were concerned for their salvation, and were zealously affected towards them as children of the same adoption. Besides, as *prophets* vary in their powers, or in their mode of expounding truth, so hearers vary in their temper and disposition: and Judas and Silas might be enabled to impress and persuade some hearts which had resisted Paul and Barnabas.

¹ As xiii. 1.

Silas may have found it so. Or he may have been so much interested in what he saw at Antioch, as to desire a longer stay. When the other messengers *were let go in peace*, that they might return to the apostles at Jerusalem, he remained behind.

34. *Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.*

35. *Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.*

36. *And some days after, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.*

Grace in the heart of man is a tender plant in an ungenial climate. The husbandman cannot be satisfied, because he has sown the seed, or raised the stem: he must watch it, weed it, prune it, nourish it. The apostles felt this in regard to those vineyards of Christ which they had planted in the midst of the heathen wilderness. They were anxious to know, how they had withstood opposition, how they had resisted temptation: what errors of doctrine might have been introduced, what inconsistent practice admitted: whether any "false brethren had crept in unawares;" whether any irregularity required correction, any brethren needed to be restrained who were "walking disorderly." Satan was ever vigilant to corrupt and injure: they must be no less diligent to give warning of his snares.

How great is the importance of that salvation, to hinder which so much is done! We estimate rightly the worth of the soul, when we estimate it by that which has been effected for its deliverance: but we may also obtain a fresh sense of its value, by considering how earnest is the enemy of man to recover into his power those who were once escaped from error.

37. *And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.*

38. *But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.*

39. *And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;*

40. *And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.*

41. *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.*

These apostles had said not long before at Lystra, “We are men of like passions with yourselves.” Here this appears. They could not agree about Mark’s character. He *had departed from them* seven years before when they first set about the work of conversion among the heathen.² Paul, it seems, had perceived in this a want of zeal: as in Demas afterwards, of whom he writes, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed into Thessalonica.”³ But Paul might not have been free from austerity, and might

² xiii. 12.

³ 2 Tim. iv. 10.

have too strong a sense of what had been amiss ; or might remember it too long : for he was but man. Barnabas, again, might not be free from natural partiality, and Mark was his nephew : for he too was but man. Neither of them followed the example set by Abram, (Gen. xiii. 7,) who said to Lot, the eldest yielding to the youngest ; “ Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee ; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee ! If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right : or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.”

But though this contention had for a while the effect of separating them, it was no lasting quarrel. Paul loses no opportunity of making honourable mention of Barnabas in his epistles :⁴ and concerning Mark, many years afterwards, he writes to Timothy : “ Take Mark and bring him with thee ; for he is profitable to us for the ministry.”⁵ These were among the last words he ever wrote : and they give us the means of knowing, that “ the sun did not go down upon his wrath.”

For the future we shall not read of Paul and Barnabas, but of Paul and Silas. These too now *went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches* : strengthening them in the faith : fixing them in the way they should go, with that authority which belonged to men chosen of the Lord for his service, and who had “ hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Numbers of persons, as we have seen, in various towns and

⁴ 1 Cor. ix. 6. Gal. ii. 1—9. Col. iv. 10.

⁵ 2 Tim. iv. 11.

countries, had turned from their false religion, from their “gods which are no gods,” and had become followers of the gospel of Christ. But how much was there to turn them aside ! How many temptations from within and from without ! How great reason to fear, of some who now believed, that they might not “continue in the word,” or “endure unto the end !” The apostle, therefore, went amongst them, *confirming* them : determining them to seek first the kingdom of God ; strengthening their souls by his advice, his exhortations, his prayers.

It is with a like intention that the bishop in our church calls before him those who in their infancy have been dedicated to God : receives from them an assurance of their faith : lays his hands upon them, in token of the divine favour ; and prays that the Spirit of Christ may dwell in them ; that they may be enabled to hold fast the things which they have received. Like the disciples now confirmed by the apostles, they have to contend against an evil nature and an evil world. Like them, they need to be solemnly “commended to God, and to the word of his grace,” that they may attain the heavenly “inheritance among them that are sanctified.” And the prayer that is offered for them, might no less justly have been offered for the Christians of Syria and Cilicia :—“Defend, O Lord, these thy servants with thy heavenly grace, that they may continue thine for ever ; and daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more, till they come to thine everlasting kingdom.”

LECTURE LIII.

PAUL TAKES TIMOTHEUS AS HIS COMPANION,
AND IS DIRECTED TO VISIT MACEDONIA.—

A. D. 53.

ACTS xvi. 1—10.

1. *Then came he to Derbe and Lystra : and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed ; but his father was a Greek :*

2. *Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.*

3. *Him would Paul have to go forth with him ; and took and circumcised him, because of the Jews which were in those quarters : for they knew all that his father was a Greek.*

4. *And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.*

5. *And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.*

We meet here for the first time with Timotheus. His own mother, Eunice, *a Jewess*, and her mother Lois, were both distinguished for their faith : ¹ and in consequence Timothy had “ known the scriptures from his youth.” Through the

¹ See 2 Tim. iv. 5.

teaching of Paul, when formerly in this country, he had become *a disciple* of Christ, and *well reported of by the brethren*. Paul perceived that he was suited to be a preacher of the truth which he held, and *would have him to go forth with him*. But there was a difficulty in the way. *His father was a Greek*; and Timothy was one “of the uncircumcision.” The Jews would be prejudiced against him; and there were many *Jews in those quarters*: therefore he *took and circumcised him*. There were obstacles enough, which could not be removed, against the progress of the gospel. He would create no new ones.

Here then we have the practical distinction between things necessary and things expedient. The Jewish party would maintain that the rites of the Jewish law were necessary to salvation. To these Paul “would give place, no, not for an hour.”² And he was now *delivering to the churches the decree* which contradicted such an error. But Paul would “give none offence.” There should be no prejudice against Timothy which might prevent any from listening favourably; no pretext for rejecting his doctrine. There is a time to yield, and a time to contend. And this was in St. Paul’s judgment the time to yield.

For undoubtedly, both on the part of Paul and of Timotheus, this was a concession: an example of that charity which spares and scruples nothing, when the cause of God may be served and the

² Gal. ii. 3. Titus, neither of whose parents were Jews, he would not allow to be circumcised.

welfare of man promoted. It proceeded from the same spirit which prevailed with Paul to say, “I will eat no meat while the world standeth, if meat cause my brother to offend.” “I have made myself a servant to all, that I might gain the more. Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews. I became all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake.”³

He has his reward.

6. *Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,*

7. *After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia : but the Spirit suffered them not.*

8. *And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.*

9. *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night ; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.*

10. *And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.*⁴

Thus the brethren in Macedonia, as well as the brethren of Thessalonica, might know “their election of God.” “God had from the beginning chosen them to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto he

³ 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

⁴ At this point of the history, Luke is supposed to have first joined Paul’s party. For he here changes the form of his narrative, and says, immediately *we* endeavoured to go into Macedonia.

called them by his gospel.”⁵ Had Paul been left to the guidance of his own mind, he would not have gone into Macedonia. *They assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.* It was the divine will that the blessings of the gospel should at present be withheld from Bithynia, and be carried to Macedonia. For a man of Macedonia appeared to Paul in a vision, and prayed him, saying, *Come over and help us.* Cross the sea which separates Greece from Asia, and let another portion of the world enjoy the glad tidings of redemption.

It was a vision. The people of Macedonia did not know their real condition, and therefore could not ask for aid. Otherwise, no entreaty could have been too urgent, no prayer too earnest or too loud. *Come over and help us*, or we perish. We are creatures of God, yet ignorant of our Creator. We are immortal beings, yet unprepared for immortality: beings capable of all that knowledge which most exalts the mind, yet scarcely possessing its first elements:—beings depraved, degraded and corrupt, yet capable of renewal and purification. *Come over and help us.* Ye have the words of eternal life: come over and expound them. Ye have in charge a merciful commission; come over and tell us, how we may have access to God through Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Ye have glad tidings of great joy which shall be all to all people: what Galatia has enjoyed, what Phrygia has enjoyed,

⁵ 2 Thess. ii. 13.

what Mysia has enjoyed, let that be now bestowed on the cities of Macedonia.

This they might have said, if "gross darkness" had not covered them. God said it for them. He realised the prophecy which lay hid in the pages of Isaiah: "I am sought of them that asked not for me, I am found of them that sought me not. I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name."⁶ And therefore he sent this vision, and made known to Paul his purpose of mercy towards the people of Macedonia.

Thus much we are informed. We are not informed why God saw fit to direct the apostles thither, and to pass over other cities. Nor need we inquire. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called."⁷ If he had not called them, by the summons of his gospel, and the suggestions of his Spirit, they would have continued for ever in their sleep, they would never have arisen from the dead.⁸

Let us remember, that the same help which was needful to the Macedonians, and was brought to them by Paul and his companions, is needful to every one. And if with the same need, there is also the due sense of need, the same aid will never be denied. If the "Lord will be found of them

⁶ Isa. lxxv. i.

⁷ Rom. viii. 29, 30.

⁸ See Eph. v. 14.

that sought him not," most assuredly will he be found of those who do seek him. If he says, "Behold me, behold me, to a nation which had not called upon his name," most assuredly "them that come to him he will in no wise cast out."

LECTURE LIV.

THE PREACHING OF PAUL AT PHILIPPI.—A. D. 53.

ACTS xvi. 11—14.

11. *Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis ;*

12. *And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia,¹ and a colony : and we were in that city abiding certain days.*

Ten or twelve years after this period, St. Paul writes to a body of Christians at Philippi, speaking of their persons with great affection, and of their faith with great confidence. The commencement of their renewed and holy state, is related here. How precious a harvest, from how small a seed ! How rapid is the growth, when God gives the increase !

Philippi was a town of some importance. Many

¹ Rather a city of the first part of Macedonia, *i. e.* of Macedonia prima. See an important note in Horne, vol. i. p. 213.

Romans were mixed up with the native inhabitants. For it *was a colony*:² it had been made part of the Roman empire. These, of course, were alike idolaters. Nothing relieved the darkness, the gross darkness which covered the people, except the few gleams of light which occasionally shone in from the Jews, who here, as elsewhere, had formed a settlement, and through their worship and their scriptures brought some of those around them to the knowledge of the true and living God.

Such was the state of the city and its inhabitants to which Paul was summoned by the vision, praying him, *Come over and help us*.

Arrived there, he must be “about his Master’s business.” He must deliver the message with which he was charged.

13. *And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made ; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.*

There was not here a magnificent place of worship ; no temple like that of Jerusalem, which our Lord’s disciples could not pass without remarking in admiration, “Master, what manner of stones and what buildings are here ?”³

Still, however, in a strange land, and in a heathen city, these foreigners could not omit the worship of God ; and we see, by what follows, that

² The dignity and advantages of a colony had been given it by Julius Cæsar.

³ Mark xiii. 1.

God was with them, and that their “prayers had gone up as a memorial before him.”

Here then the apostles spake unto the Jewish women, and to those who were their fellow-worshippers. We know what would be the character of their discourse. We may take it from the words of Zacharias, Luke i. 68 : “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel ; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David : As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began : That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us : To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant ; the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.”

Thus would the apostles preach unto their Jewish hearers. That the prophecies were now all fulfilled : that the sacrifices of the law had been explained : they had been types and shadows of what was now come, of that one full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice which God had received for the sins of the whole world. Then they would appeal to the proof of this which he had given, in that he had raised up Jesus from the dead ; who was now for ever at God’s right hand, where “he must reign, till he had put all enemies under his feet :” and till he had received into his kingdom all such as should

believe in his name, and confess him as their Saviour and their Lord.

The sower sowed the seed. What would come of it? Would the birds of the air devour it, before it could sink within the heart? Would Satan be able to prevent its entering in, and taking root?

This we may ask, wherever the word of God is spoken. Shall it be heard, as if it were not heard? Thought of no more? Shall it be at first admitted, and begin to spring; and afterwards be cut off by difficulties and temptations, or so choked with cares and worldly things, as to produce no fruit? Or shall it make a firm lodgement within, take root downward, abiding root, and bear fruit upward to the glory of him who planted it?

This must depend upon the heavenly husbandman. In this case, certainly, he was present to bless the work of the sower. There was at least one “honest and good heart,” which so received the word that it did take root and grow, and brought forth fruit many fold. The historian says,

14. *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*

How singular are the ways of Providence! This woman was of Thyatira, a place adjoining the region of Asia, where Paul had intended to preach the gospel, but was “forbidden of the Holy Ghost.”⁴ In her course of worldly business she is brought across the sea to Philippi; and there she hears, and

⁴ Ver. 6.

there she receives, the word of life. She *attended to the words spoken*: heard them in a different manner from others of the same assembly. This is clearly implied here; and it is no less distinctly stated, that this was the Lord's doing: the effect of his influence. *Her heart the Lord opened*: opened what is not open naturally: opened what without his grace would have been closed.

So it is everywhere, and at all times. "Some believe the words spoken, and some believe not." And those who have been led to receive the scriptures, as they are in truth, as the word of God, will not to be slow to give God the glory: to acknowledge that if he had not moved their hearts, they would have remained for ever shut against his word.

At the same time we are not surprised that God did distinguish this woman by his blessing. It is in agreement with his usual ordinance, that they who seek shall find. For observe her conduct. She was but a sojourner in Philippi, come thither as a seller of purple cloth, for which her part of Asia was famous. But she had not, when she left her home, left also her religion behind her. She had sought out those who worshipped God, and had gone with them to the place of prayer.

Neither was she so engrossed with worldly affairs as to neglect all other things. She was not in Jerusalem, or in Judea, where the sabbath would be observed by all: but she was in a heathen city, where it would be observed by none except the Jewish residents. She might therefore have carried on her trade, and sold her purple cloth; but she

had been brought to the knowledge of that God, who, when he made the world, “blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it :” and therefore we find her, not in the market, not offering her purple to the passers by ; but joining the party which had gone *out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made.*

Perhaps there are many whose advantages have been much greater than this woman’s, who might learn a lesson from her.

Such was the person *whose heart the Lord opened that she attended unto the things spoken of Paul.* She attended to them. And they were “the words of eternal life.” Had she been otherwise minded, and put them from her, she would have put eternal life away. So infinite, so incalculable is the concern dependent on the manner in which we hear that word, which is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”

LECTURE LV.

LYDIA IS BAPTIZED, WITH HER HOUSEHOLD,
AND RECEIVES THE APOSTLES AS HER GUESTS.

—A. D. 53.

ACTS xvi. 15.

15. *And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.*

Such is the continuation of the history of Lydia, whom we lately left, attending unto the things which are spoken of Paul. We find by what follows, how much was included in the word, *attending*.

We know by experience what it is to attend or not attend, to a thing spoken, an offer made. If we think it concerns us, may convey to us some good, or relieve us from some evil, we attend to it; we give our mind to it; we lay hold of it. Otherwise it passes by us like the wind. The words of Paul did not pass by this woman. It was matter of consequence to her, that "God had so loved the world, as to send his only Son, that all that believe in him might not perish but have everlasting life." She thought within herself, This is the very comfort which I need. If I have a soul which must return unto him who gave it: if there is an account held of "the things done in the body:" then, "blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." And blessed be God, who has laid on One, One infinite and omnipotent to bear it, that iniquity which must otherwise have overwhelmed us at the judgment day. "Yea, blessed be God for his unspeakable gift!"

Thus she attended to the things spoken. We may expect, perhaps, that she would lay them up in her mind, to be thought more upon hereafter, and acted on at "a more convenient season." No such delay could satisfy her. If he that believeth and is baptized is saved; if he is saved who receiveth Jesus as the Christ, and the sign of re-

ceiving him is the being baptized in his name ; what hinders my being baptized ? So she would reason. And we read that *she was baptized and her household*. All persons are justly fearful of delay when they find an offer suit them. There often is, indeed, delay in things relating to the soul. The Lord's supper, for example, becomes now often, practically, the seal of faith, as the sacrament of baptism was the seal of faith to Lydia : and this is delayed by many, for want of fitness, they urge ; but really for want of faith, for want of will, for want of a heart entirely surrendered up to God. But when we truly feel the value of what is offered us, we do not wait till to-morrow for what we may secure to-day. And so it was with Lydia, and with her household, moved no doubt by her advice, and influence, and example. *She was baptized and her household*. They entered into the fold of which Jesus was the shepherd. They were grafted upon the vine of which Jesus is the stem. They were made part of that family in heaven and earth, which is named after Him whose "name is above every name." They were made ministers of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

There is a striking sentence in St. John, 1 Ep. iii. 14 :—"By this we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death." Now Lydia, if truly converted, and "led by the Spirit" of God, had passed from death unto life.

And she at once gives this sign of the indwelling Spirit, this proof of true conversion, that her heart overflows with love to those who had now become her brethren. We find her saying, *If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.* She would not allow the apostle and his party to remain any longer at their own charges, or to lodge among the heathen in the city ; they must abide at her house. But why is it added, *she constrained us*? No doubt, because they were as scrupulous in receiving, as she was free and hospitable in offering. They might urge, We shall be chargeable to you : we shall interfere with your interests ; for we are the objects of suspicion and enmity ; and as you esteem us, because we are the apostles of Christ, others, because we preach in his name, revile and persecute us. So they might truly say. And even in christian countries it would not always, or everywhere, advance a man's worldly interests to be distinguished as the friend of those who were more zealous than others in the cause of God. Lydia, however, had made up her mind. If Christ was her's, the friends of Christ must be her's too. They had been the instruments by which she received a treasure which she valued above earthly friendship, or earthly fortune, or life itself. And she must show them the poor return which was in her power : she must give them the refuge of her home. For her own sake, with the courtesy and the delicacy which is one of the surest signs of heavenly grace, and as a favour to herself, she en-

treats them : *If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us.*

Here then we leave this happy company. Surely they were happy. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls ; who when he hath found one pearl of great price, goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that pearl." Lydia had found this pearl of great price, and had secured it for her own. And, doubtless, the Lord who opened her heart that she should attend to the things spoken of Paul, would not desert her now, but enable her to experience the "joy and peace of believing."

And Paul too would be happy. God had given him these first-fruits of his visit to Philippi. He had that proof that God was with him of a truth ; and a fresh jewel was added to the "crown of rejoicing,"¹ which he was providing against the great day, when both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

One reflection occurs, which may be useful to ourselves. We have heard the gospel from our youth, which Lydia on that sabbath heard for the first time. Have we attended to the word spoken ? Has it possession of our hearts ? And could they who know us best, and understand religion best, judge us to be *faithful to the Lord* ?

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 19.

LECTURE LVI.

PAUL AND SILAS SCOURGED AND IMPRISONED
AT PHILIPPI.—A. D. 53.

ACTS xvi. 16—24.

16. *And it came to pass as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying :*

17. *The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.*

18. *And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned, and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.*

We have seen before on several occasions that *soothsaying*, or *divination*, was much practised as an art or trade among the heathen. Those who professed it took advantage of any individual qualities or circumstances which they met with, and turned them to their profit. This young damsel had such qualities. An evil spirit possessed her. And the sort of madness under which she laboured fitted her for the purposes of those who dealt in divination.

Paul saw it to be a proper time for employing a power which could overcome the spirit of evil. *I*

command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. She was restored to her right mind.

19. *And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market place, unto the rulers,*

20. *And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,*

21. *And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.*

The miracle which Paul had performed had no effect upon the minds of these Philippians, except to raise their indignation. When such a case occurs; when men are blind to the proofs which God has given of his power, or deaf to the arguments which might convince them, and turn them to God, there is commonly a ground for it which we can perceive. They “love darkness rather than light,” because the light would be inconvenient to them. We are told of Herod, that he was much struck with John the Baptist; that he “did many things, and heard him gladly.”¹ Why did he not do more, and become one of John’s disciples? Because if he did, he knew that he must put away Herodias. Why did not the Jewish rulers confess Christ Jesus, though, as we are assured, they “believed in him;”² saw that he was sent of God? Because they “sought honour one of another;” loved “the praise of men,” which they could not make up their minds to resign.

¹ Mark xi. 20.

² John xii. 42.

It was the same case at Philippi. These heathen saw the power which Paul had used, and how at his bidding the evil spirit left the damsel, and she became another creature. Why, we might ask, why did they not believe that he who had done this thing must indeed be *the servant of the most high God*? why not inquire from him *the way of salvation*?

Because salvation was not their object; they were not seeking it. Salvation was future; their minds were on things present. Salvation was unseen; they were occupied with things seen, things temporal. Had these persons been seeking after God, “if haply they might find him;” had they been distressed under a sense of their transgressions against him, and their unworthiness to appear before him; then they would have laid hold on these messengers of God, these ambassadors for Christ, not to injure but to court them. The case of Lydia would have been acted over again. But their hearts were entirely elsewhere: altogether set upon *their gains*. And therefore they felt nothing, thought of nothing, but that *the hope of their gains was gone*, and that they must revenge themselves upon the apostles, who had caused this loss to them. They stir up the people against these troublers of the city, these innovators in religion, who were *teaching customs* unknown to the laws of Rome; that is, were showing the evils of idolatry; leading men to the living and true God.

Such is the opposition, against which, in many periods of the history of Christianity, scriptural

truth has been forced to contend and fight its way. And for the same cause. It has threatened the gains, condemned the pleasures, opposed the tastes which men were following. It is grievous to reflect, in every state of society, how many have a sort of vested interest in sin and error. And when the word of God is brought forward which refutes such error, and condemns such sin, then these bestir themselves: the “strong man armed” will not surrender “his palace” without a struggle; they instigate their party and inflame their neighbours, saying, *These men, being Jews, (or whatever else they see fit to call them,) do exceedingly trouble our city, teaching customs which we have never been used to observe.* And too quickly is the flame excited, and finds fuel to feed it in too many hearts. So it proved in the present instance, as soon as the rumour was spread, and the accusation heard.

22. *And the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.*

23. *And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely:*

24. *Who having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.*

This is one of those changes to which all human life is more or less subject; but none so much as the life of the apostles. A few days ago we left them full of satisfaction, and enjoying the comforts of hospitality in the house of Lydia. Now, having

suffered *many stripes, they are thrust into the inner prison, and their feet set fast in the stocks.* It explains the words of St. Paul to the Philippians, when he says, “ I know both how to be abased, and how to abound ; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”³ Lately he was abounding in ease and plenty. And he knew how to partake of this comfort without injury to his soul : he had learnt the art of enjoying earthly happiness, so that it may serve to promote the happiness which is above : he could still maintain humility and moderation. Now he is called to a reverse. And the person who is instructed to enjoy prosperity, is also best instructed to endure reverses. Such, the apostle tells us, was his case. He knew “ how to be abased and to suffer need.” He was practised in the lessons of patience and resignation. “ I have learnt,” he says, “ in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

Whosoever would learn the same lesson, must apply to the same divine Master : and then he may add what Paul adds, “ I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me.”

Phil. iv. 12, 13.

LECTURE LVII.

THE COMFORT OF PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON.

A. D. 53.

ACTS xvi. 25.

25. *And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God : and the prisoners heard them.*

This is a remarkable account, and well deserves consideration. One who heard two prisoners thus engaged, would be led to suppose that they had been declared innocent, and were on the morrow to receive a full discharge. Very different was the state in which we left these two prisoners. On the morrow they were to be brought before an angry populace, and tried by magistrates who had already treated them cruelly and unjustly : and now, while still suffering from the many stripes which had been laid upon them, they had been thrust into the inner prison, and their feet set fast in the stocks. Still they were tranquil and calm, “ committing themselves to him that judgeth righteously : ” nay, more than calm—joyful—and with hearts unfettered and spirits unrestrained, they *sang praises unto God*, so that their fellow prisoners heard them.

It was the fulfilment of their Lord’s promise :
“ Peace I leave with you ; my peace I give unto you.

In the world ye shall have tribulation ; but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world.”¹

Let us stop to inquire, how this promise is fulfilled : through what medium could men, who had the feelings and nature of men, be in this state of mind at such a time ? Cruelly beaten, with the smart of many stripes upon them : placed in an inner prison, and in a painful posture ; and with every reason to expect still farther suffering on the morrow. Now we are truly told, by him who had himself undergone this, that “ no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous.”² How then is nature overcome ? How was it overcome in this case ? How were Paul and Silas enabled, not to pray only ;—that we might expect—many will pray at such a time who pray at no other—but to show signs of cheerfulness and thankfulness : to *sing praises unto God*.

Two things joined to produce this.

First, the Spirit of God, shed abroad upon their hearts. And next, the expectation of a great reward in heaven.

First, the Spirit of God produced that in them, which Paul desired that it might produce in others : it “ filled them with joy and peace in believing.” It testified within them that they were children of God, for whose good all things should work together ; and that he “ of very faithfulness had caused them to be troubled.” This thought was sufficient to outweigh all their present pain

¹ John xiv. 27 ; xvi. 33.

² Heb. xii. 11.

and trial : just as one unhappy thought, one pang of fear, one sting of conscience, one cloud of horror disturbing the mind, is able to overshadow every outward means of comfort, and to cover the richest or gayest scene with the spirit of heaviness.

“ Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread ?”³ Such were the words of a queen to a king : of Jezebel to Ahab, when he had “ come into his house, and laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and could eat no bread.” He had not been struck with illness : no calamity had come upon him ; whatever could minister to his pleasure, his luxury, was within his reach. Yet there he lies, and might envy the poorest of his subjects, whose mind was at ease. He was under the influence of an evil passion, and therefore was he sad. He coveted the vineyard of Naboth ; and disappointment in this desire made all that he possessed seem worthless in his eyes. He had none of the Spirit of God within him ; therefore nothing could give him peace and joy. The apostles had that Spirit ; and therefore they could joy, not only when comfort shone around them, as in the house of Lydia, but even now, when all outward comfort was withdrawn. They had a light which nothing could extinguish ; a sense of peace which no injury could remove ; and therefore they could “ joy in tribulation also.” They had that comfort with which all God’s people are comforted ; which he alone can give, and he alone can take away.

³ 1 Kings xxi.

Still it is right to observe, that spiritual joy like that of Paul and Silas, is not often the lot of Christians in ordinary life. It is a cordial, and reserved for great occasions. God suits his gifts to the circumstances of his people. He bestows that in their seasons of affliction, of persecution, of earthly trial and privation, which he withholds at other times. He gives to every individual of his people according to their several necessity, according as he sees to be expedient for them. Comfort was now expedient for Paul and Silas : all without was dreary, they must be cheered within : and they were cheered ; and *the prisoners heard them*, not murmuring over their misfortunes or their injuries, but *praying and singing praises unto God*.

But, doubtless, there was a thought through which this comfort was conveyed and impressed upon the heart. They “had respect unto the recompense of reward.” They looked unto the end. It is the end which sweetens the present toil. A man “rises up early, and late takes rest, and eats the bread of carefulness ;” not because such labour is in itself delightful to him, but because it leads to something he desires : he may so acquire honour, or obtain wealth : his family may be better provided for. And for this he bears the present toil. Such too is the principle of the Christian. He denies himself, he “keeps under his body, and brings it into subjection.” He submits to reproach. He suffers, if need be. Because he looks beyond the present trial to the future

reward. He is assured that his "light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

This, then, was the immediate spring of comfort which the disciples were now tasting, and through which they were supplied with peace and joy. We know it was, for they have told us so. Paul tells us his habitual state. "To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." As the servant of Christ, and in obedience to his will, he was always labouring, and now he was suffering. Had his life been taken, as he had every reason to expect, it would have been his gain; it would have carried him earlier to that rest which awaited him: that rest, of which some years after he speaks with so much transport: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing."⁴

These last words show that the comfort possessed by Paul and Silas, even under their sharpest trials, was not conferred on them peculiarly; belonged to them, not as apostles of Christ, but as believers in Christ. Those who can apply to themselves the same description, "To me, to live is Christ," may also enjoy the same reflection as the support of every day of trial, the encouragement of every day of labour, the comfort of every day of care:—Death must come: and "to die is gain."

⁴ 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

LECTURE LVIII.

THE KEEPER OF THE PRISON IS CONVERTED
AND BAPTISED. — A. D. 53.

ACTS xvi. 26—32.

26. *And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.*

27. *And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.*

28. *But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.*

29. *Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,*

30. *And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*

Thus it appears, why this earthquake had been ordered by Him, who has all the elements under his command. Not so much on account of the apostles. They might have been set free as quietly as Peter was, when he awoke from his sleep and found himself at liberty. But God had mercy in store for the keeper of this prison. The earthquake which shook the foundations of the prison, shook also that which is often more hard to move—the stony heart. The bands were loosed which had

held the prisoners' limbs; those stronger bands were also loosed, in which Satan had held this keeper of the prison. He perceived by the earthquake, and by the conduct of the apostles which ensued, that some mighty power attended them, and that to persecute them was to oppose that power; to ill-treat them was to fight against God. So *he came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, saying, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* How can I escape the vengeance of this power which protects you, and which, by severely handling you, I have provoked?

Observe, here, the different dealings of God with men's hearts. Sometimes the voice which calls them is the still small voice which no one hears except he to whom it is addressed. So it was in the case which recently came before us, the case of Lydia; of whom we merely read, that "the Lord opened her heart, so that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul."

It happens thus with many now, who are brought up in a christian land. As there are many, who, possessing the same privileges, see as if they saw not, and hear as if they heard not, and never understand, or come to the real knowledge of the truth, so there are others who do attend to the things spoken, and receive them into their hearts, softened and prepared by the dew of divine grace. The "seed is cast into the ground, and springs, and grows up," silently and unobservedly.¹ They hear the voice of God, whilst it is yet the still

¹ See Mark iv. 27.

small voice. And blessed are they who do so ; lest he either pass by them altogether, or come to them in the whirlwind or the storm.

Sometimes he does thus reveal himself. It needs not the thunder which rends the heavens ; it needs not the earthquake which shakes the foundations of the prison ; perhaps illness, in a few hours showing a man the precipice on which he stands, and disclosing the gulf below ; perhaps affliction—"the desire of the eyes," the treasure of the heart, taken away "at a stroke ;" perhaps reverse of fortune, depriving a man at once of all that he most loved, and reducing him to that which he most dreaded—these are voices in which God sometimes speaks, and forces them who have been too long deaf to his mercy, to listen to his anger.

One thing, however, we must constantly bear in mind. Whether it be the gentle voice, or whether it be the voice of thunder, it is not the voice, but the Lord who sends the voice, that produces any effect upon the heart. There may be the earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake ; not a soul is shaken. There may be the cloud, but the Lord is not in the cloud. Not a drop falls—not one tear of penitence is shed. The dispensation effects nothing ; the Lord must direct the dispensation, that it may not return unto him void, but accomplish the thing for which he sends it. Many hearts are as little penetrated by the judgments of God, as by his mercies. And the earthquake would have been no more to this jailer, than the

gracious tidings proclaimed by Paul had been to the magistrates who imprisoned him, if the grace of God had not attended the sign of his omnipotence, and moved the heart to ask, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*

When the heart was moved to this inquiry, the answer was at hand. No need of hesitation or delay.

31. *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

32. *And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*

Here was no time for a laboured discourse, or a long system of instruction. Neither was it necessary. For a few sentences may convey the whole “mystery of godliness.” Mystery though it be, such as never can be exhausted; though there are wonders connected with the gospel such as “angels desire to look into;” yet the whole of saving truth may be spoken in few words. The apostles may be supposed to have replied in terms like these to the anxious inquiry made of them.

You desire to know whether there can be mercy for you, and you may be saved from the wrath to come—delivered from the just vengeance of that God whom you have been offending all your life, and whose power has been now displayed before your eyes. There is mercy for you. That God delighteth in mercy. Judgment is his “strange work.” He willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should come to repentance. This is

the very truth which we are commissioned to proclaim, and for proclaiming which we are thus treated. We declare, that “God so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son, that all that believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” He was appointed, and he consented, “to bear our sins in his own body” on the cross, “that he might bring us to God.” Join thyself to the company of those who “receive him.” Be baptized, and admitted among his flock, and *thou shalt be saved, and thy house*. Thy family, which may follow thy example, all shall become part of the Lord’s family. For “this day is salvation come into this house.” And “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.”

In language such as this, we may suppose, the apostles *spoke the word of the Lord* to the keeper of the prison and his household. They were ambassadors for Christ; the word of reconciliation was committed to them that they might declare to the penitent rebel the terms of his forgiveness.

It was not all that was needful for him to know : he would still have much to learn both of doctrine and of precept. But this, and no other, must be the basis of his change of state ; he must “arise, and wash away his sins,” in the fountain of Christ’s blood, and so enter upon a new life, following the commands of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways.

These things are not new to us, as they were to the jailer at Philippi. But they are no less im-

portant. And it is often useful to look into the heart, to go down, as it were, to the foundations of our faith, and see that all is safe ; that our hope is built on the same sure ground, the rock immovable and unchangeable, “ Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.”

LECTURE LIX.

ALTERED CHARACTER OF THE JAILER. THE
APOSTLES ARE DISMISSED FROM PHILIPPI.—
A. D. 53.

ACTS xvi. 33—40.

33. *And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes: and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.*

34. *And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

Such was the effect of that *word of the Lord*, which the apostles had declared to the keeper of their prison. That word may be sometimes heard for years, and the way of salvation may still not be understood. Sometimes it takes root immediately, and springs up rapidly. It is, as the soil may be prepared or unprepared. It is, as the Lord may give the increase.

In the present case, we cannot wonder if the work was sudden. The jailer had seen that which feelingly convinced him that in a few hours he might be lost for ever. Therefore, as we are told, *he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.* The same grace which had reached his heart, extended to his household also; and they too received the message of the apostles, and were “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins.”

In what follows, we perceive the manifest signs and proofs of that “new creature,” which whoever is in Christ Jesus will become, and must become. For he *brought them into his house, and set meat before them: and rejoiced, believing in God, with all his house.* So entirely his former thoughts had “passed away,” and had been succeeded by others of a new and different complexion. Yesterday, he had no feeling for the apostles: bleeding from the stripes which they had received, unheeded, untended, he “thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.” We need not accuse him of any extraordinary cruelty, but certainly he showed them no kindness, cared nothing for their miserable condition; for he had not yet learned to “put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, meekness.”¹ “Behold, all things are become new.” Now he does care for them; now he has compassion on them; *took them the same hour of the night and washed*

¹ Col. iii. 12.

their stripes; made amends, as far as might be, for former neglect and severity. Yesterday, it was their heinous offence that they were ministers of a God unknown to him; that they taught new customs, which it was not lawful for the people to receive. Now, it is their greatest honour, that they bear the message of the most high God. These men, which show us the way of salvation, must want no comfort or attention. *He brought them into his house, and set meat before them.* He thought nothing of the risk and danger which might follow such conduct towards the prisoners committed to his charge. Other considerations were now uppermost in his mind, and present inconvenience did not affright him.

We are further told, that *he rejoiced, believing in God, with all his house.* He did not consider the faith which he had embraced as a thing to be submitted to, but to be rejoiced in. And with good reason. Is it no misfortune to be at enmity with God? to have nothing to hope from his mercy, everything to fear from his anger? Such had been the case with this man. Then, is it no blessing to be at peace with God?—to have nothing to fear from his anger, everything to hope from his mercy? Such now was the case with this man. “Being justified by faith, he had peace with God through Jesus Christ.” He who before was “without God in the world,” and who, when taken from the world could look only for “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish,” was

now reconciled to God by “ the blood of the everlasting covenant ;” his sins were blotted out, and he was “ accepted in the Beloved.” The “ child of wrath” was become the child of God : the heir of the kingdom of darkness was become heir of the “ kingdom prepared for the righteous.” The sense of this, shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost, would cause him to “ rejoice in the Lord.” “ The God of hope filled him with all joy and peace in believing.”

At the same time, the christian life is not always “ joy and peace.” We do not pretend that it is. The jailer and his household, who now rejoiced, would doubtless find occasion hereafter for different feelings, while working out their salvation in the world. The very next day they might expect persecution from the magistrates, on account of the kindness shown to Paul and Silas. And not only would their outward comfort, but their inward peace be disturbed ; they would find resistance within, when their evil passions, now for a while subdued, began by degrees to rise against the new “ law of the mind” which restrained them ; when Satan, now dispossessed of his subjects, began to stir himself, and try to recover his dominion. The christian life is a race, and “ he that striveth for the mastery” has much to do, which is not always agreeable to flesh and blood. The christian life is a warfare, and “ he that warreth” must endure hardships and trials, and be humbled sometimes, as well as sometimes triumph. In short,

these, like others, must submit to the general rule, that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

But still there was reason for rejoicing now. If there is “joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,” there may well be joy on earth, when he who “was dead is alive again, he who was lost is found.” There might hereafter be cause of sorrow for these very persons. But if we were never to rejoice on earth, because we might hereafter be called to weep, this world would be indeed a vale of tears. This man had secured to himself one who “is able to save unto the uttermost.” Let, not the foundations of their prison alone, but of the universe, be shaken : he need not fear, though “the heaven and the earth should pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat.” He, “according to the promise, would look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” And meanwhile, he had one to rely on, who can be “touched with human infirmities,” and “knows how to succour them that are tempted.” Cheered by these thoughts, and hopes, and promises, we cannot wonder that he *rejoiced in God with all his house.*

The report of what had taken place in the prison seems to have been spread abroad, and to have reached the ears of the magistrates.

35. *And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.*

36. *And the keeper of the prison told this saying to*

Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go : now therefore depart, and go in peace.

37. *But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison ; and now do they thrust us out privily ? nay verily ; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.*

38. *And the serjeants told these words to the magistrates : and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.*

39. *And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.*

40. *And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia : and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.*

Personally, the apostles claimed no respect or dignity. They could humble themselves, and become servants to all. But the ministry must suffer no reproach. The people had seen them hurried to prison, treated as no Roman citizen was permitted to be treated ; and the same people must now be convinced that there was no just cause for this : they who had cast them publicly into prison, must now *come themselves, and fetch them out*. This was all they required. When their character was cleared, they were willing to *depart, and go in peace*. But first let them *enter into the house of Lydia, and comfort the brethren* there. And surely there was much to comfort them ; much to bear witness to, of the support which they had received in the hour of need ; of the way in which God had interposed his power, to strike terror into their enemies, and to convert their keeper's heart.

And, not only might those brethren be comforted ; but all who are within the bond of the same covenant may find comfort too : may be sure that they are watched over by the same gracious care, and that according as their need is, so shall strength be supplied to them.

LECTURE LX.

PAUL'S PREACHING AT THESSALONICA.—A. D. 53.

ACTS xvii. 1—4.

1. *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews :*

2. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,*

3. *Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead : and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.*

Persecuted in one city, the apostles proceed to another. Opposition and ill-treatment divert their course, but do not change their object. They pass through Amphipolis and Apollonia, two towns in Macedonia, where not a sufficient number of Jews resided to have established a regular place of worship, so that no opportunity of addressing the

people was open to them. But at Thessalonica Paul found a synagogue ; and to that he resorted, and declared his message, on three succeeding sabbaths. So he reminds the Thessalonian disciples afterwards. “ Even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.”¹

His purpose was to prove that *Jesus, whom he preached unto them, was Christ*: was he, “ whom the Spirit of the Lord had anointed” to fulfil the prophecies and accomplish the promises: to be all that the Jews expected in the Messiah.

The objection to this, on the part of the Jews, was his lowliness and humiliation, and, above all, his cross and passion. How did this agree with the character of king, as foretold in the scriptures? How suit the description of one who was “ to rule his people Israel?”—“ to sit on the throne of David for ever?” How was he to be a deliverer, who had not saved himself from a cruel death?

To these objections Paul was to reply. And we read that he did reply, and show them that the scriptures, properly interpreted, did in truth coincide with all that had come to pass, and could not be otherwise explained: for that *Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead*.

We may conclude that there are two arguments on which he would principally rest. First, the nature of their law, which required continual sacri-

¹ Thess. ii. 2.

fice, and thus showed, that without shedding of blood is no remission ; while, at the same time, the scriptures intimated that these sacrifices were not in themselves precious or sufficient, but were the types and shadows of something to be hereafter fulfilled and revealed. Nothing could be more clear, than that a great part of the worship of the law consisted in the offering of sacrifices as an atonement for sin. Nothing, on the other hand, could be more certain in itself, or more plainly declared by the prophets, than that the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin. This is cleared up in the words of David. Speaking the language of Christ, he saith, “ Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me : in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.”² Thus “ he taketh away the first,” the sacrifices required by the law, “ that he may establish the second, the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

The second argument would be taken from the nature of the prophecies. If Christ had not suffered, how should Isaiah be fulfilled? (Isa. liii. 3, &c.) “ He was despised and rejected of men : a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief : and we hid as it were our faces from him : he was despised, and we esteemed him not. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her

² Ps. xl. 6—8 ; Heb. x. 5—9.

shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken." "And the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

What could these words mean, but that *Christ must needs have suffered?* While other prophecies, speaking of his exaltation and glory, signify no less plainly that he *must needs have risen from the dead*, and resumed his throne in heaven.

It was here, as elsewhere. To the hearts of some the words of Paul were carried home, and wrought conviction.

4. *And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout³ Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.*

Fewer here, it would seem, of the Jews than of the *devout Greeks*: that is, those who, like Cornelius, through the Jewish scriptures, had been brought to worship the true God, and had neither idols to cast off, nor Jewish prejudices to confound them.

There were also those, not here mentioned, who had idols to cast off, and who did cast off their idols. In his letter to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul speaks of success which is not here related. "For our gospel," (he says, 1 Thess. i. 5—10) "came not unto you in word only, but also in

³ Or *worshipping* Greeks. Paul makes a distinction between these two parties in ch. xiii. 16. "*Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.*"

power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance ; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost : so that ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad : so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God ; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”

Such were the blessed consequences of this visit to Thessalonica. They explain the vision, when the “ man of Macedonia appeared to Paul in the night, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” There was a people, then indeed without the knowledge of God, and “ worshipping the creature more than the Creator ;” but which might still be brought “ out of darkness into marvellous light :” brought to exhibit that picture here given of the faithful Christian, who is “ serving God” on earth, and “ waiting for his Son from heaven :” to whom, “ to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”⁴

⁴ Phil. i. 21.

LECTURE LXI.

PAUL AND SILAS ARE FORCED TO LEAVE THIESSALONICA, AND ARE RECEIVED AT BEREÆ.—
A. D. 53.

ACTS xvii. 5—12.

5. *But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason,¹ and sought to bring them out to the people.*

6. *And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also :*

7. *Whom Jason hath received ; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.*

8. *And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.*

The Jews which believed not were always the bitterest opponents of the gospel. As commonly happens in such cases, they did not scruple about the means by which they resisted its progress. Here they collected a crowd of that sort of persons which a populous town furnishes ; and they sounded

¹ Writing to the Romans, xvi. 20, St. Paul says, “ Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.” It is, therefore, probable that Jason was a relative of Paul, and had received the party at Thessalonica.

the usual watchword on such occasions, innovation. *They set all the city in an uproar, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.*

There have been many in the history of mankind of whom the same account might be truly given. They have changed the course of the world : of that part of the world to which their influence reached. But not by such means as were used by the apostles. By violence and force of arms they have overthrown the existing state of things, and effected a general change. But the apostles employed no "carnal weapons." They warred not as the men of this present world. St. Paul appeals to this very people, as to the means by which he had prevailed over them. (1 Thess. ii. 7.) "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children : so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." But the instruments they used, the gentleness and meekness, the truth and reason, these proved "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds : casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God."²

With this allowance, to the charge here made against them they would plead guilty. We are desiring to *turn the world upside down* : to "turn it from darkness to light, from the power of Satan

² 2 Cor. x. 4.

unto God :” to turn it from “ wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness,”³ sensuality, cruelty—to righteousness, and peace, and gentleness, and temperance, and charity. So the words of the prophet might be accomplished, (Isa. xi. 6,) “ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid : and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them.”

In another respect, these enemies of truth misrepresented the doctrine of the apostles. They accused them of doing *contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.*

This, too, was no new accusation. But when it was alleged against the Lord himself, and Pilate asked him, “ Art thou a king then ?” he replied, “ My kingdom is not of this world.”⁴ He was indeed a king. And the apostles would affirm that he was a king : a king who “ must reign till he had put all enemies under his feet.” But his kingdom was not of this world ; neither would his servants fight that they might establish his throne, with any of those arms by which earthly kingdoms are gained or defended. Their object was not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. No earthly monarch need fear him as a rival ; but all ought to court him as their best ally, their surest defender : for his laws are, “ Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou

³ See Rom. i. 29.

⁴ John xviii. 36.

then not be afraid of this power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. Render, therefore, to all their due: tribute to whom tribute is due: custom to whom custom: fear to whom fear: honour to whom honour.”⁵

Such was the king, whom his subjects were accused of setting up in defiance of Cæsar. But in these tumults where a people *of the baser sort* are excited and brought together, there is little question of truth or falsehood: the accused are seldom heard, and if they were, the accusers, and perhaps even their judges, are often incapable of understanding truth or reason. St. Paul alludes to this, when, speaking of the characters by which he had been opposed, he prays to be “delivered from unreasonable and wicked men.”⁶

Here, however, *the rulers of the city, when they heard these things*, acted far better than the magistrates at Philippi.

9. *And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.*

10. *And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea:⁷ who coming thither, went into the synagogue of the Jews.*

11. *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

12. *Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.*

⁵ Rom. xiii. 1—7.

⁶ 1 Thess. iii. 2.

⁷ Another large city of Macedonia, southward of Thessalonica.

Thus the apostles were driven from Thessalonica, and carried the blessings of which they were the bearers to a better climate and a kindlier soil—to those who *received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily*, that they might find it explained there and confirmed. Even at Thessalonica, though forced to quit it hastily, their visit had not been barren or unprofitable. There was a seed planted which should “take root downward and bear fruit upward:” there were plants which the dew of heaven should water, and over which the providence of God should watch, and which should bring forth “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.”⁸ At first there was the blade, when they “received the word in much affliction;” still they received it “not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God.”⁹ Two years afterwards, the blade had reached the ear; and Paul could speak with delight of “the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope,”¹ which flourished among the Thessalonian Christians. So “effectually had the word wrought in them:” so manifestly proved itself to be “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”¹

Yet all the blessing which springs from such a life, and all the still more inestimable blessing which belongs to it hereafter, would the unbelieving Jews have denied to this people, forbidding the

⁸ Matt. iv. 88.

⁹ 1 Thess. i. 6; ii. 13.

¹ 1 Thess. i. 3.

apostles “ to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved.”²

Truly, those who in any way hinder the progress of religion, whether outwardly in the world, or inwardly in the soul, deserve the reproach which the apostle casts upon them, speaking of his opponents at Thessalonica: “ They please not God, and are contrary to men.”³

LECTURE LXII.

PAUL'S CONDUCT AT ATHENS—A. D. 53.

Acts xvii. 13—17.

13 *But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.*

14. *And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul, to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.*

15. *And they that conducted Paul, brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.*

Such was the first impression on Paul's mind, that he could not dispense with the presence of

² Thess. ii. 16.

³ Thess. ii. 15.

Silas and Timotheus to assist him in his labours. But when they afterwards arrived, a stronger feeling prevailed; a feeling of interest for the Thessalonians whom he had left receiving the word with “readiness of mind,” but “in much affliction.” He would gladly have returned to them himself; but when this was impossible, he chose “to be left at Athens alone,” and could not forbear to send back to them Timotheus, “to establish them, and comfort them concerning their faith,” “that no man should be moved by these afflictions.” For “now we live,” he says, “if ye stand fast in the Lord.”¹

So close are the ties which the gospel binds around the heart, so affectionately it unites together those who bestow and those who receive the blessing.

16. *Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.*

17. *Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.*

Here the mind of the apostle is disclosed to us, and in the most interesting manner, because, as it were, incidentally. The narrative leads us to suppose that he had not intended to preach the gospel at Athens, but to proceed onward as soon as his companions joined him. What he saw around him changed his purpose. *His spirit was stirred*

¹ See 1 Thess. ii. 18; iii. 1—8.

in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Thoughts like these must have passed in his mind. Here are immortal beings, beings formed for an everlasting existence, who are so living in this present world, that their future state must be a state of misery. Here are those, who “professing themselves to be wise,” are really in the deepest ignorance. They are strangers to the true God—strangers to his laws, and careless of his will. They are strangers to their own destiny; thinking themselves in life, they are in the midst of death: not knowing the sinfulness of sin, not knowing the consequences of an ungodly, unholy, unrighteous course, when “we must all appear before the judgment-seat of God to give account of the things done in the body.”

But to me, who am called to be an apostle, and “separated unto the gospel of God,” to me is entrusted the word of life and ministry of reconciliation. Shall I remain silent while these perish? Shall I not make known the riches of God’s mercy, that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved?” Shall I not warn them that they “turn from these vanities to serve the living God?” Shall I not proclaim the covenant of grace, how “God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless them, in turning away every one from his iniquities?”

Thus would the apostle muse, and thus would “the fire kindle within him,” till at last he pursued his usual course at Athens as elsewhere, and *disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, and with*

the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

We see, then, that the apostle was affected by none of those considerations, which often have restrained the efforts which might be made for the spiritual instruction of heathen idolaters. He thought it no sufficient excuse, for instance, that he had not been specially sent to Athens, and that his purpose was elsewhere. Like his divine Master, he must always “be about his Father’s business”—he must always have his will in view—always endeavour to promote his glory. Neither did he deem it a reason for leaving these idolaters in ignorance, that they had been bred up in ignorance: that the “vain conversation” in which they were living had been received “by tradition from their fathers.” Though well aware that they had to do with a God all-wise and all-merciful, who, while he saw their errors, knew also their temptations; yet he did not think this a reason for permitting them to continue in a state in which they were practically alienated from their Creator and their Judge. No such thoughts restrained him. He had the express “revelation of the righteous judgment of God,” that he will “render to every man according to his deeds:” “to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”² This was enough to satisfy him as to his duty. Whilst he knew that the Judge of all the earth would do right, he also knew that he would do according to his revealed word. He “believed God,” that it

² See Rom. ii. 6—10.

will be as he has declared. And one thing especially would actuate the apostle. He had the words of eternal life. He was entrusted with the message of mercy. He knew what was “acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”³ Who then could tell, but that through his warnings, his labours, his instructions, these heathen might “be converted and live,” and the object of Christ’s death be accomplished in their salvation?

17. *Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.*

And his example teaches us to “go and do likewise;” and not to leave others in their sin and ignorance, on the plea that God is merciful, or that it is not our particular calling to instruct them. God is merciful. And he shows this, by making his people instruments of his mercy. We are naturally inclined to pursue the path of ease, and leave matters to their course. To interfere, and attempt to change that course, requires exertion. But so does all duty, and must not for that reason be set aside. Every one should examine, with respect to the moral state of his fellow-creatures, in what degree it may depend upon himself; upon his silence, his neglect, or his influence and assistance. He must not be satisfied with what they are. He must inquire what he can make them.

³ 1 Tim. ii. 4.

Whether we look to the heathen world abroad, or whether we look to the multitudes at home who yet remain in ignorance and sin,—it is not enough for us to argue, They are what God, who created them, sees fit they should be ; we must also reflect, whether we could not have altered their condition ; could not have imparted to them that knowledge, for lack of which men perish.⁴ Are we no way accountable for their moral state ? May it not be the will of God to make us the means by which he may show towards them his mercy ? Can we not awaken their carelessness, or enlighten their ignorance ?

Let all, as they pass through the world, bear this in mind. It may give them comfortable reflections when their earthly journey draws towards its close. They will not have been “barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵ They will not have “hidden in the earth the talent “which was put into their hands.”⁶ An apostle has left it written for our encouragement : “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.”⁷

⁴ See Hosea iv. 6.

⁵ 2 Peter i. 8.

⁶ Matt. xxv. 24.

⁷ James v. 19.

LECTURE LXIII.

PAUL'S DISCOURSE AT ATHENS.—A. D. 54

ACTS xvii. 18—31.

18. *Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics, encountered him.¹ And some said. What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.*

19. *And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus,² saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?*

20. *For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.*

21. *(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)*

The character of the people at Athens struck the sacred writer as unlike that to which he was accustomed in his own country. There was not the same activity in commerce and ordinary business. Still less was there the same certainty as to the great questions in which mankind are most con-

¹ Two sects among the ancient philosophers. The Epicureans, so called from their leader, Epicurus; the Stoics, so called from the place in which they once used to assemble.

² Or the hill of Mars, the ancient god of war; as in verse 22. It was the principal court of judicature in Athens.

cerned. The origin, or beginning of the world—the divine nature—the duties of man—the real welfare of man,—all these things were settled for the Jewish people by their scriptures; but all these things were matter of doubt and dispute among the Athenians; and their philosophers, and the strangers who resorted thither for instruction, *spent their time in nothing else but either to hear or to tell some new thing.*

It pleased God that one from a distant and obscure country should be now sent to declare to them truths which, with all their wisdom and searching, they never had discovered.

22. *Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' Hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.*³

23. *For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I saw an altar with this inscription: To the unknown God. Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.*

The heathen people worshipped various gods, whom they called by different names, as appeared before at Lystra. To these gods they raised altars, and offered sacrifice; and the altar was inscribed with the name of the god who was worshipped there. Paul, however, had observed an altar *with this inscription, To the unknown God.* He skilfully takes advantage of this circumstance, and introduces the knowledge which they had not

³ Or, as the phrase might be translated, *ye are disposed to revere the powers above.*

reached by their philosophy, but he had received by revelation.

24. *God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands :*

25. *Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things :*

26. *And hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation ;*

27. *That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he is not far from every one of us :*

28. *For in him we live and move, and have our being ; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*

29. *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.*

In these few words, does Paul instruct the ignorance and refute the errors of these heathens.

Was the world made, or has it existed for ever ? This was one of their questions. *God made the world and all things therein.*

How is he to be worshipped ? Will he inhabit the temples built in his honour ? will his favour be conciliated by the precious gifts which are offered at his altar ?

He dwelleth not in temples made with hands : neither is worshipped with man's hands, as though he

needed anything, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, and giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. “ They who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

Does it concern mankind that there is a God ? Are they bound to reverence him, to consult his will ? This the Epicureans denied.

He has made men for this very purpose, and determined the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.

Does he notice men’s conduct ? are their ways seen by him, and regarded by him ?

He is not far from every one of us. Your own writers acknowledge this ; for they say, We are his offspring. If then we are his offspring, he is not like unto gold or stone ; he is a living God : and in him we live, and move, and have our being.

Thus does the apostle lay the foundation. He sweeps away the errors, that he may establish the truth. And then he proceeds to the more immediate subject of his ministry.

30. *And the times of this ignorance God winked at ; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent :*

31. *Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

Till now, God had not seen fit to interpose, and make himself manifest to those who “ did not like to retain him in their knowledge :” who gave no

sign that they were really seeking after him, and desiring to find him. Now however, the time of ignorance was past. God *now commandeth all men everywhere to repent*. They are no longer to walk after their own desires : they are no longer to make to themselves gods which are no gods : or think by an outward formal worship to pay that reverence which the divine Majesty requires. *He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness* : he “ will render to every man according to his deeds : to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life ; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.”⁴

But this judgment is to follow death. And they would ask, What can follow death ? “ Man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ? ”

God, who reveals this purpose, has given also evidence of his purpose. He has *given assurance* of it : in that *he hath raised from the dead that man whom he hath ordained* ; and who shall come again to *judge the world in righteousness*. If Christ be not raised, then are our words vain. But Christ is risen ; and by his rising has left a testimony of God’s intention, and a proof of his power.

Thus does Paul, like the Baptist John, prepare the way for the Redeemer. The Baptist said, “ Repent ye ; for the kingdom of heaven is at

⁴ Rom. ii. 7—9.

hand.” Be warned to “flee from the wrath to come.” And so Paul acquaints the Athenians, that *God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.*

Are we surprised that here is yet no *gospel*, properly so called? No mention of the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world?”

These hearers, as yet, were conscious of no sinfulness; needed no tidings of salvation, because they felt no sense of danger. We must first enact the law; we must first erect the tribunal; we must first give authority to the judge; we must first show that the result is, life or death; before the criminal will seek an advocate, or desire a mediator. And so far Paul has gone: he has made known to them the Governor of the world: he has declared the law: he has revealed the judgment-day. Let them be awakened to their real state; let them be “pricked in their hearts,” and say, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Let them ask, “Who shall stand when he appeareth?” Let them inquire, “Wherewith shall I appear before the Lord?” Then, how gladly would he proceed to preach unto them “a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord:” how gladly declare the truth with which he was entrusted, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved.”

LECTURE LXIV.

EFFECT OF PAUL'S DISCOURSE AT ATHENS.—

A. D. 54.

Acts xvii. 32—34.

32. *And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked ; and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.*

Such was the end of that discourse which Paul addressed to the company at Athens. On the greater number it produced no permanent effect. It left them where it found them, except that it gave them more to account for.

When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. The idea of existence beyond this present world was not altogether strange to the heathens. Vague notions floated amongst them that the soul might survive, and continue to live in some new and different state. But what Paul meant by *the resurrection of the dead* ; the resurrection of the whole man ; with a body restored to him, with a consciousness of the same being which had lived, and thought, and felt, and acted, in this present world : this was entirely new to them ; and

when they heard of it, *some mocked*, and thought, no doubt, that it was enough to ask, “How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?”

And yet, had they inquired, instead of mocking, they might have found reason to see that it was not incredible that God should raise the dead. If man has been once formed—formed by the hand of a Creator—he may be formed again. God, who gave the first body, can restore “to every man his own body.”¹

But the seed fell by the wayside, and “the fowls of the air devoured it.”

In other cases, when the seed is sown, the surface is less hard, but the event is still the same. So it proved with another class of these Athenian hearers. *Others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.* It was not so with the Ethiopian, who exclaimed, “Sir, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptised?” It was not so with the jailer at Philippi, who saw death on the one side and life on the other, and “at the same hour of the night was baptized, he and all his household, straightway.” These Athenians put off the subject to a distance. *We will hear thee again of this matter.* Thou hast told an interesting tale. “When we have a convenient season, we will send for thee,” and attend to it again. Nay, “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” “To-day, if ye will year his voice, harden not your hearts.” The voice which, if ye had listened to it, might have

¹ See 1 Cor. xv.

been life from the dead, if now you prove deaf to its summons, you may hear no more for ever.

33. *So Paul departed from among them.*

34. *Howbeit, certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.*

The word, then, did not return altogether void. It had a purpose to perform, and it performed its purpose. *Some clave unto him.*² The expression is strong. It implies that close adherence which we might expect when the soul is concerned. We may conclude that they followed Paul to his abode, and inquired more particularly into “the strange things which he had brought to their ears.” Perhaps Dionysius, like Lydia at Philippi, constrained him that during the remainder of his stay at Athens he should abide at his house. The Spirit had so awakened his heart and conscience, that they responded to the things which he heard. He did not resist that feeling, and lightly dismiss the apostle till another time: but he, and *Damaris, and others with them*, pursued their inquiry till the seed took deep and firm root, and they *believed*—they became converts to the gospel of Christ.

Dionysius, we are told, was an *Areopagite*: a member of that council which was called after its place of meeting, *Mars’ Hill*. To be a member of that council was to be a person of first importance. A person of such rank and station makes a greater sacrifice, if he leaves the party and the

² Κολληθευτες αὐτῷ, ἐπιστευσαν.

connexions to which he has belonged, than one who has fewer worldly interests to abandon. This, no doubt, was the ground of the Lord's remark, "How hardly shall they that are rich enter into the kingdom of God!" But there was no want of such persons, as we have already seen, among those who first embraced the gospel. There were enough to show that those whose education had enabled them to form a judgment upon a matter placed before them, when they were brought to attend to the apostles, found that which they could not resist: nay, which they could not be satisfied without securing it as their own. Some mocked, others postponed; but not for want of proof, but for want of will—will to inquire, or yield to conviction.

So Paul departed from among them: left the learned Athenians. Their learning would soon be of no avail. "Man returneth to his earth, and all his thoughts perish." But he left behind him a small but a faithful company, whose learning would not perish. They had been "made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus." And these through endless ages shall find fresh mysteries to look into, fresh wisdom to adore.

LECTURE LXV.

PAUL PREACHES THE GOSPEL AT CORINTH.—

A. D. 54.

ACTS xviii. 1—8.

1. *After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth ;*

2. *And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla ;¹ (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome ;) and came unto them.*

3. *And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought : (for by their occupation they were tent-makers :)*

4. *And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.*

If Paul had not been born a Jew, he would have had no trade, no *craft*, to which he might resort on occasions like the present. He was of that station in life which in other countries is exempt from manual labour. But by the custom prevailing among the Jews, all their youth were instructed in some handicraft trade : and now, rather than be a burthen to Aquila, he wrought with him in his occupation as a tent-maker. And not now only.

¹ Of whom further mention is made, Rom. xvi. 1, and 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

In his epistles, he frequently alludes to this as his habit. He had done the same at Thessalonica. As he writes, (2 Thess. iii. 8, 9,) “ Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought ; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you. Not because we have not the power, but to make ourselves an ensample to you to follow us.” I might have demanded support from you : for it is the will of God that “ they that preach the gospel should live of the gospel :”² but I preferred leaving you an example, both of disinterestedness and of industry.

We might ask, perhaps, Could not he, by whose “ hands special miracles were wrought,” have furnished himself with all things needful ? Such was not the will of God, that the power which he imparted to his servants should be exercised for their private use or interest : or that a miracle should effect a purpose which could be accomplished by other means. There were other and natural means by which these wants of the apostle might be supplied. He might supply them by his industry : his converts might supply them by their liberality : and the faith of both parties would be displayed. It proved so. For Silas and Timotheus soon brought with them a remittance from Macedonia.³ And we see the wisdom of Paul’s conduct by what he writes to these very Corinthians a few years after, when a jealousy had been excited against him : (1 Cor. xi. 9 :) “ When I was present -

² 1 Cor. ix. 14.

³ See 2 Cor. xi. 9. Phil. v. 15.

with you, and waited, I was chargeable to no man : for that which was lacking to me, the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied ; and in all things I have kept myself from being burthensome unto you, and so will keep myself.”

5. *And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia,⁴ Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews, that Jesus was Christ.*

6. *And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean : from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*

Once more,⁵ Paul is forced to leave his countrymen in all their sin and guilt, for they rejected its only remedy, and to turn unto the Gentiles, for they would hear him. First, however, he delivers his own soul. He *shakes his raiment*,⁶ in token of the way in which God would shake them off who refused his call ; and testifies that he is “ pure from their blood.”⁷ *Your blood be upon your own heads.* Let not your unbelief be laid to my charge. *I am clean.* “ I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.” He is alluding to the words of Ezekiel, (xxxiii. 3—5,) where the spiritual teacher is compared to the watchman of a city, or sentinel of an army, who is set to blow the trumpet, and alarm the people, when he sees “ the sword,” the danger, “ come upon the land.” “ Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet,

⁴ See xvii. 13. 2 Cor. i. 19.

⁵ As Acts xiv. 45.

⁶ See Nehemiah v. 13.

⁷ Acts xx. 26, 27.

and taketh not warning, if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning: his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh the warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned: if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand."

Does the language of the apostle here seem tinged with severity? It is the severity of grief, and not of anger. For we know what was in his heart: what he writes to the Roman church; (Rom. ix. 1, 2; x. 1;) "I say the truth in Christ: I lie not: my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer for my countrymen is, that they may be saved."

In fact, his parting address implies the most affecting earnestness. The words are those of one who sees a company in which he feels a deep interest, bent upon some enterprise which he knows must end in their destruction. He remonstrates, reasons, exhorts, but in vain: and at last leaves them, saying, You are resolved on death. It is your own seeking. I take all to record this day, I have delivered my own conscience. I have warned you of the end.

7. *And he departed thence,⁸ and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.*

8. *And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized.*

There was some ground “which drank in the rain which fell upon it,” and “received blessing from God.”⁹ Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, separated himself from his unrepenting brethren, and enjoyed an honour which belonged to few. We learn (1 Cor. xiv.) that he was baptized by the apostle's own hand. And thus was the foundation laid of that Corinthian church, which rose afterwards like one of their own ancient temples, with many a noble ornament and many a polished shaft, to the praise of that gospel which Paul proclaimed, to the glory of that name which the Jews blasphemed. *Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized.*

⁸ Preached no longer in the synagogue.

⁹ See Heb. vi. 6.

LECTURE LXVI.

PAUL IS ENCOURAGED BY A VISION TO REMAIN
AT CORINTH. GALLIO REFUSES TO ACT
AGAINST HIM.—A.D. 55.

ACTS xviii. 9—17.

9. *Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace :*

10. *For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee : for I have much people in this city.*

11. *And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

There are seasons when the servants of God need especial comfort and encouragement. And there are seasons when he sees fit to communicate such consolation. It was given to Paul at Corinth. He was assured of protection. “*Be not afraid ; but speak, and hold not thy peace : for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee.*” He was assured, too, of what still more concerned him, that his “labour should not be in vain in the Lord.” *I have much people in this city.* And here we observe the all-seeing eye, which is ever watchful over the interests of the soul. The Lord knows his own, knows them while they are yet “a great way off,” and provides that they shall be brought nigh. Many had already believed and

were baptized : and he foresaw that many more would be “ added to the church daily,” and it would become that large body to which Paul afterwards addressed his letters, and from which the light of divine truth was reflected throughout a wide adjacent region.

Another remark arises from these words. They point to a bright example of the power of divine grace. Even in this luxurious and dissolute city (for such was the character of Corinth) the Lord *had much people*. Paul might have replied, Lord, we know that “ the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” We know that the sins of adultery, and uncleanness, and idolatry, and covetousness, are abominable in the sight of “ the High and Holy One which inhabiteth eternity.” And such sinners are these. For such they were. To these very persons he writes, after a few years, (1 Cor. vi. 11,) “ Such were some of you. But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

Here, then, were these, the *much people* whom the Lord foresaw, and for whose sake he favoured Paul with a special vision, so that *he continued there a year and six months, preaching the kingdom of God among them*. But still greater is the consolation handed down to all future ages by the fact which this example sets before us. The Lord knows every heart, and no individual escapes his notice who is disposed “ towards the attainment of everlasting salvation.” He beholds them from

afar, while they are yet “enemies of God through wicked works:” he calls them by his word; he justifies them by his merits; he sanctifies them by his Spirit: they are those of whom he speaks, saying, “All that the Father giveth me are mine. And they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.”

12. *And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia,¹ the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat,*

13. *Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.*

14. *And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong, or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:*

15. *But if it be a question of words, and names, and of your law, look ye to it: for I will be no judge of such matters.*

16. *And he drave them from the judgment-seat.*

17. *Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes,² the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.*

¹ *I. c.* When Gallio was proconsul. He was the younger brother of the philosopher Seneca. It is singular that Seneca speaks of him as remarkable for courtesy; or rather, perhaps, that easiness of temper which makes men popular. “Nemo mortalium uni tam dulcis est, quam hic omnibus.”

² It does not appear clearly whether the Greeks were taking part with the apostles or the Jews, or whether Sosthenes was ill-treated as belonging to the Jewish or the Christian side. A Sosthenes is mentioned elsewhere as a companion of Paul 1 Cor. i. 1.

On former occasions, as we saw at Philippi and at Thessalonica, the magistrates had readily listened to the accusations made by the Jews against Paul, and had been accomplices in the ill-treatment which he received. Here the case is different. Gallio disregards them. He perceives that there was no transgression of the public law, which it was his office to maintain; no danger of tumult, except what the enemies of Paul might excite; and therefore he would not enter into the matter, and drove them from the court. God had so willed it. He had said to “the noise of the waves, and the madness of the people,” Peace, be still. He had promised Paul, *No man shall set on thee to hurt thee*. Therefore Gallio is an exception to the other magistrates, and that which had been done elsewhere could not be done at Corinth.

There is no such promise made generally. No such promise was made to the apostle, except on particular occasions. The general promise is, that “all things shall work together for good to them that love God;” that whatever is suffered, shall be repaid, repaid abundantly: but certainly it is not promised that no opposition shall be encountered, or injury received. All we know is, that nothing can happen which is not overruled. “Even the hairs of your head are all numbered.”

We are glad that Paul should escape without injury. But we cannot approve the character of the magistrate Gallio, who *cared for none of these things*. Things were brought under his notice which might

have interested him. The earnestness of Paul, regardless of the danger to which he was exposed : even the earnestness of the Jews in maintaining their ancient law : the warm and anxious feelings excited in each party, might have roused him from careless indifference. But he was alike regardless of truth and error. His concern was, to carry on his government with as much ease as possible. His whole conduct is a specimen of the manner in which persons occupied in worldly affairs, and wholly intent upon them, suffer the most important subjects to pass as it were before their eyes, and pay no heed to them. That might be said of him, which will hereafter be so awful a recollection : “ Nevertheless, know this, that the kingdom of God hath come nigh thee.”

“ In the day of the revelation of the Lord Jesus,” how different will be the light in which all things shall appear ! The veil shall be removed which overspreads the carnal eye, and those things will prove to be realities which were as shadows, and those to be shadows which had been treated as the only realities. Then all who had formerly *cared for none of these things*, will acknowledge them to have been alone wise, who have sought the Lord while he might be found, and “ fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them.”

May the Lord lighten our darkness, and enable us to see the things belonging to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.

LECTURE LXVII.

PAUL VISITS MANY CHURCHES. APOLLOS IS ADDED TO THE MINISTRY.—A.D. 56.

ACTS xviii. 18—28.

18. *And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchrea : for he had a vow.¹*

19. *And he came to Ephesus, and left them there : but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.*

20. *When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not ;*

21. *But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh, in Jerusalem :² but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.*

22. *And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.*

23. *And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.*

¹ Probably this refers to Aquila. Such vows were not uncommon, on account of some deliverance granted or benefit received. Cenchrea was the sea-port of Corinth.

² What feast is uncertain. His object probably was to carry to the destitute brethren in Judea the contribution made for them.—See Rom. xv. 26.

No doubt, they would need much *strengthening*, both against inward and outward foes. They might communicate to him the trials which they endured when friends reproached them, and neighbours separated themselves from them. He would show, that no strange thing had happened to them; “no temptation taken them, but such as is common to man:” for that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.” So it had been foreseen and foreshown.

They might complain of the power of Satan, still harassing them: of the remainder of sin disturbing that comfort which they had expected. This, too, the apostle would explain; showing, that our rest is not here; and that the promise is not, that Satan shall be disarmed, or shall be idle, but that, being resisted, he shall be overcome. Such difficulties, he would add, are rather signs for good than for evil. They are signs that God has given you light to see the way of righteousness, and grace to oppose the obstacles which hinder your progress in it. If you were content to go the downward road, all would be smooth with you. Those who ascend, must strive and labour.

Whilst Paul was thus engaged, another and a valuable labourer was added to the field.

24. *And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.*

25. *This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.*

26. *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue : whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*

A little while ago we were introduced to Aquila and Priscilla, as giving hospitality to Paul when he arrived at Corinth. We now find them engaged in spiritual labours, and imparting the knowledge which they had received. There were many of this class in the early church. The apostles preached the gospel, declaring how God, in love towards the world, had sent Jesus Christ “that all that believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” When these words were carried to the heart of any heathen, a new world was opened to him. He would be, from that moment, in a new condition towards God, whom before he had not known, of whose mercy he now had this assurance. But how vast a scheme would remain to be unfolded to him ! The creation—the sin of Adam—the patriarchs—the call of Abraham—the history of his posterity—the law of Moses—and the whole long series of Jewish annals. The man finds himself in a strange country, and he has its language to learn.

At the same time there was provision that he might learn it. Those who had themselves become acquainted with divine truth would have the same desire to teach, as the others to inquire. Their object would be to serve the cause, to show their interest in its blessings, by promoting it :

to express, as best they could, their thankfulness to him who had so loved them.

When there is this will, it may always find room for exercise. Here the way was clear. The elder converts, who had been longer under instruction, and others who had abundant talent, or a larger share of divine grace, would impart of their knowledge to the disciples who were younger in age or intelligence; and so prepare them for the more full and perfect teaching of the apostles, or the regularly appointed pastors of the congregation.

Paul set a high value on these labours and these labourers. He frequently alludes to them in his epistles. “Salute,” he writes, “Urbane, our helper in Christ. Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, who laboured much in the Lord.”³ In the same passage, he mentions these very persons, Aquila and Priscilla, as his “helpers in Christ Jesus.” We know, because we have just seen, in what way they had been his helpers. There was Apollos, a man by his natural powers, and by his acquirements, greatly fitted to be a preacher of the truth. For he was *an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures*. But he was very imperfectly instructed; *knowing only the baptism of John*.

Aquila and Priscilla, hearing him in the synagogue, perceived what he had learnt, and what he had yet to learn: so they *took him unto them, and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly*.

³ Rom. xvi. 9—12.

It realised the saying of our Lord, that great as John was, so that no greater prophet had appeared among men, “ he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”⁴ Apollos, we may conclude, like John himself, had warned men to depart from evil, to flee from the wrath to come. It could not be said, that he was *instructed in the way of the Lord*, that he taught *the things of the Lord*, if he had not believed in Jesus as the Messiah, in whom the prophecies were fulfilled.⁵ Still, *knowing only the baptism of John*, he could lead men but to the threshold of the gospel. He could have had no just views of the christian covenant. He might say, with the better instructed Peter, (ii. 38,) to as many as consulted him, “ Repent.” But he had not that clear understanding which would enable him to proceed on with Peter, “ Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

All this, however, and more also, had these two disciples learnt: and having experienced in their own hearts the power of the gospel, they were able to communicate the things which they had felt and known. Though not apostles, they could teach one who was to act as an apostle. Though not themselves ordained teachers, they could prepare a teacher for his work.

Apollos was not idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus which he thus acquired.

⁴ Matt. xi. 11.

⁵ See Bishop Bloomfield on Acts. Lect. xi.

He had learnt the way of God more perfectly, only that he might expound it more perfectly.

27. *And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace.*

28. *For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*

LECTURE LXVIII.

PAUL AT EPHESUS.—A.D. 56.

ACTS xix. 1—7.

1 *And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,*

2 *He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.*

3 *And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.*

This small company which Paul met at Ephesus, was of the Jewish nation, being “a people prepared for the Lord,” who had not yet come fully under Christian instruction. They were *disciples*: they believed that Jesus, whom their countrymen had crucified, was Lord and Christ. Called

originally by the preaching of John the Baptist to consider their ways, they had been baptized *with the baptism of repentance*. And they give an example of the fulfilment of what was predicted concerning John by the angel who announced his birth. “Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.”¹

But these, like Apollos, had yet much to learn. They had not been instructed in all the mysteries of God, or received the full measure of the doctrine of Christ. Especially, they had not known that the prophecy of Joel was now accomplished, and that God had “poured out of his Spirit upon all flesh;”² thus explaining the assurance of their own master, John the Baptist, concerning him who was to come: “He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.” They had not known, that the promise made by Jesus himself was now fulfilled in those who believe in him: the promise which he made when “the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”³

Paul, therefore, asks, You are *disciples* of Christ: you believe in him as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world:” Have the gifts

¹ Luke i. 16, 17.

² Ch. ii. 17.

³ John vii. 39. The phrase in the Evangelist is the same as the phrase in this passage. There it is, *το πνευμα ἅγιον οὐκ ἦν ἐτι*. Here it is, *Οὐδε εἰ πνευμα ἅγιον ἔστιν, ἤκουσαμεν*. There is nothing, therefore, to warrant the insertion of the word, *any*. The more exact rendering would be, We have not even heard whether there is an *effusion* of the Holy Ghost.

of the Spirit been bestowed on you, as on other congregations of disciples? Have any prophesied? any spoken with tongues? any done wonderful works?

Their answer signifies that they had not heard whether such a power of the Holy Ghost was granted at all. The Holy Ghost they knew. His power had always been exerted. "Holy men spake of old time as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But they had not heard of such an effusion of the Spirit as Paul alluded to, or known that they were to expect it.

4 *Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, That they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.*

5 *When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*

6. *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.*

7. *And all the men were about twelve.*

Paul did that here which Peter had done in Samaria; using the same power which had there excited the envy of the impostor Simon, and which he desired to purchase by money, (viii. 19,) "saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." That which money could not buy, Paul here bestowed "without money and without price:" those special gifts of the Spirit which accompanied

the first preaching of the gospel, and which the apostles were commissioned to confer.

In a different sense it may be asked of all, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* The promise is general to all believers: “Ye shall receive the Holy Ghost.” He is the Sanctifier, who crowns the work of the Redeemer. By him is the Christian “sealed unto the day of redemption,” having “the earnest of the Spirit in his heart.”⁴ So that the apostle addresses the Corinthian disciples: “Know ye not, that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you?”⁵

The signs of this, no doubt, are very different from the signs here described. The signs at Ephesus were extraordinary. *When Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied.* The ordinary signs are, a life led “in the faith of the Son of God:” a heart “not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of the mind.” The proofs of the presence of the Spirit, are “the fruits of the Spirit,” which are “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”⁶ If these fruits do not appear, we may ask with the apostle, *Unto what then were ye baptized?* This is the end, the object of baptism. It is “the washing of regeneration, the renewing of the Holy Ghost.”⁷ We are “buried with Christ by baptism into death;

⁴ Eph. iv. 30; 2 Cor. i. 22.

⁵ 1 Cor. vi. 19.

⁶ Gal. v. 23.

⁷ Tit. iii. 5.

that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”⁸

May the power of the Spirit of God be as evident in all who profess and call themselves Christians, as it was in the case of those twelve, who were now *baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and not improbably became the appointed elders of the rising Ephesian church.

LECTURE LXIX.

PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL AT EPHESUS.—A. D. 58.

ACTS xix. 8—20.

8. *And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

9. *But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.*

10. *And this continued by the space of two years : so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

11. *And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul :*

⁸ Rom. viii. 4.

12. *So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.*

Unusual opposition on one side ought to be met by unusual exertion on the other. The Jews here at Ephesus showed more than common obstinacy, so that Paul after a while *separated the disciples altogether*.¹ He, on his part, wrought more than ordinary miracles. *When divers were hardened and believed not*, to these he was able to appeal, and so to confirm the wavering, and convince the reasonable. Like Samuel of old, when more than a thousand years before this same people had shown the same perverseness : (1 Sam. xii. 16 :) Samuel said, “Stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to-day ? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain, that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great which ye have done in the sight of the Lord. So Samuel called unto the Lord : and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day ; and the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.” In like manner might Paul say, I preach unto you the words of eternal life. Ye cavil and deny. Stand, therefore, and see these “mighty signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit of God.”² Is there any other power by which *diseases depart and evil spirits go out* of those who are oppressed by them ? Could a man perform these wonders by any virtue of his own ? God

¹ As at Antioch in Pisidia. Ch. xiii. 42, 43.

² Rom. xv. 19.

effects them through my hands ; and so commands you to “repent and believe the gospel.”

The particular miracle which follows is an example. It had exactly the effect recorded in the book of Samuel. As there “the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel,” so here we read that *when this was known, fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.*

13. *Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.*³

14. *And there were seven sons of one Seera, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.*

15. *And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know ; but who are ye ?*

16. *And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*

17. *And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus : and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.*

18. *And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.*

19. *Many also of them which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men :*

³ Exorcists. That class of persons to which our Lord alluded, when he asked of the Jews, “If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out ?” These, seeing the effect of Paul’s use of the name of Jesus, adjured the evil spirits in the same name, but with none of the same faith. Compare Matt. viii. 29.

and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

20. *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.*

For a while, some of those who had been convinced by Paul's doctrine, and by the signs attending it, still adhered to their heathen practices. The proofs which they now saw of the Spirit of God working with Paul were too strong to permit this longer. It was weak faith which permitted it even for a day. A sudden and appalling miracle increased their faith : either made assurance surer, or the impression stronger : and so prepared them for the sacrifice of present interests which was required, if they meant to be " faithful to the Lord." The truth was irresistibly brought before their minds, " What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?" *So they confessed, and showed their deeds : many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men.* Utterly destroyed the instruments of an ungodly practice, in the same manner as Moses utterly destroyed the molten image which the Israelites had set up for worship. It was not merely cast aside, or disfigured, but " ground to powder : " as these books were *burned*, that no relic might remain, no seed of evil which might hereafter spring up and breed corruption. Had they retained the books, there would be danger. The heart is deceitful, and must not be trusted within sight of its temptation.

But might not the books be sold ? The price of them was fifty thousand pieces of silver : and whatever might be the value of the coin, the sum must

be considerable.⁴ Still they must not be sold. Whatever it was sinful for these converts to keep, it would be equally sinful for others to possess and use. Here, therefore, was a case which illustrates our Lord's parable: "If thine hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee. If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee." However dear the practice, however valuable the possession which leads thee to offend against God, cast it from thee, if thou art in earnest "seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness." As Zaccheus did, when renouncing at one resolve what we must suppose to have been his former habits, he devoted half his goods to the poor, and restored fourfold whatever he had wrongly made his own.

"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come follow me; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."⁵ Such was the test proposed to one, who seemed to aspire towards eternal life: but his faith failed: he "went away sorrowing," and clung to his possessions. These at Ephesus had stronger faith—they bore the test—they *brought the books* which had been their means of gain, and *burnt them before all men*.

It was the "new creature"⁶ formed within their hearts. It was the new world opened before them:

⁴ If the coin was a drachma, the sum would amount to about fifteen hundred pounds; if a shekel, to about seven thousand.

⁵ Matt. xix. 21.

⁶ 2 Cor. v. 17.

the new object to be chiefly valued, and first secured. All other things, however dear before, now lost their value in comparison.

In this way we ought to judge of the sincerity, the reality of our faith. Is it to us “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen?”⁷ Does it make us act as we should act, if heaven and hell were open to our sight?

The first belief of these Ephesians had not been thus effectual. They kept their unlawful books, and continued their *curious arts*, as Rachel, though married to Jacob, secretly retained her national idols. When their faith was strengthened and confirmed, it compelled them to renounce their arts and destroy their books of sorcery. And it is not till faith has this effect, of bringing every desire and habit into obedience to Christ, that we dare to call it real, or effectual to salvation. “Who-soever is born of God doth not commit sin.”⁸ He cannot allow in himself any known or wilful sin, “because he is born of God.”

⁷ Heb. xi. 1.

⁸ 1 John iii. 9.

LECTURE LXX.

OPPOSITION EXCITED AT EPHESUS.—A. D. 59.

ACTS xix. 21—41.

21. *After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying,¹ After I have been there, I must also see Rome.*

22. *So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus ;² but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.*

23. *And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.*

24. *For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines³ for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen ;*

25. *Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth :*

26. *Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods which be made with hands :*

27. *So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set*

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 23.

² 2 Tim. iv. 20. Rom. xvi. 22.

³ Supposed, rather, to be silver medals of the magnificent temple of Diana, which were purchased by travellers visiting it.

'at nought ; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

By this craft *we have our wealth.* So Demetrius argues : and therefore truth must be excluded, and therefore error must be maintained. He does not trouble himself to inquire whether it be indeed as Paul said, *that they be no gods which be made with hands ;* the matter of imputation was, that *this our craft is in danger to be set at nought,* when men shall no longer value *the great goddess Diana.*

Such is too often the argument which perpetuates evil ; and that not only among heathen idolaters. Wherever falsehood in doctrine or error in practice has long prevailed, there are many who have an interest in its continuance. The Pharisees and scribes, for example, had an interest in maintaining the Jewish law. By it *they had their wealth :* by it they had their reputation : were held in credit among the people. Unquestionably this would strengthen their opposition to the ministry of Jesus. So, long before, Jeremiah had complained, “ The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means ; and my people love to have it so.”⁴ All are concerned in maintaining what is wrong. The teachers and the hearers are linked together, by some practice which is gainful or some habit which is agreeable. Some procure popularity, and others obtain wealth, which would cease if this new doctrine be received.

⁴ Jer. v. 31.

Many may be still found who argue like Demetrius, and what took place at Ephesus may take place again. The minister who “teacheth the way of God in truth,” may still often find a Demetrius to oppose him, and a people to join the outcry. If it be true that “the way is strait, the gate narrow which leadeth unto life,” those who would follow it must be sober, be vigilant. If it be true that “the way of destruction is broad and many” enter it, then those practices which lead astray, those temptations which allure the young and thoughtless, those things that minister to the “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,” instead of being sought and encouraged, must be avoided and laid aside. But *by this craft men have their wealth*: and a cry is raised like that at Ephesus, *This Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people*.

Such is human nature when opposed by the word of God. The current runs smoothly till a barrier is set up: then appears the violence of the stream below. God, however, “sitteth above the water-flood;” and not a wave can roll beyond the limit he allows. So it was seen on this occasion.

28. *And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.*

29. *And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius⁵ and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia,*

⁵ The name of Gaius occurs again in the next chapter, ver. 4, and that of Aristarchus, as sailing to Rome with Paul, xxviii. 2.

Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

30. *And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.*

31. *And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.*

32. *Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.*

33. *And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.⁶*

34. *But when they knew that he was a Jew,⁷ all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.⁷*

35. *And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not, how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?⁸*

36. *Seeing then these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.*

A Gaius is mentioned by Paul as his host at Rome, Rom. xvi. 23; and Aristarchus as his fellow-prisoner, Col. iv. 10.

⁶ Probably, as a Jew, to prevent his being confounded with the cause of Paul, by those who *knew not wherefore they were come together*, and could make no distinction between Jews and Christians.

⁷ The people of Ephesus knew the Jews as opposed to the idolatry they were now upholding, and were not aware that they were generally no less opposed to the doctrine of Paul.

⁸ Such was the vulgar belief concerning the statue of Diana in this temple.

37. *For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor blasphemers of your goddess.*

38. *Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies : let them implead one another.*

39. *But if ye inquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.*

40. *For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.*

41. *And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.*

Such is the proper use of law. As St. Paul writes, (Rom. xiii. 3,) “ Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same : for he is the minister of God to thee for good.”

It was very different at Philippi. There the magistrates made themselves instruments of the violence and injustice of the mob. But here they take the apostle's part : whether from regard to his cause, or from a sense of right and duty, we know not ; but God made use of their authority to protect his servant, and to strengthen the influence of the gospel at Ephesus.

Paul, meanwhile, had a support within, to which he trusted most, and which would not fail him even if the magistrate had failed. So he writes, looking back upon scenes like these, (2 Cor. iv.

8—12,) “ We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed ; we are perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live, are alway delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”⁹

The life of Jesus was manifested, when he furnished daily support to his servants. Men saw that he was *living*, was superintending his church, when the weakness of “ mortal flesh” was strengthened ; when afflictions and persecutions which would overwhelm all human power, seemed but more firmly to establish the gospel. The disciples saw this, and believed. Every attack which threatened death to the disciples, increased that spiritual energy by which they might be enabled to resist temptation, and “ hold fast the blessed hope” of everlasting glory.

⁹ 2 Cor. iv. 8—12. “ So then, death worketh in us, but life in you.” See, to the same purpose, 2 Cor. i. 3—10.

LECTURE LXXI.

PAUL PREACHES AT TROAS, AND RESTORES
EUTYCHUS.—A. D. 60.

ACTS XX. 1—12.

1. *And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.*

2. *And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece,*

3. *And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.*

4. *And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.¹*

5. *These going before tarried for us at Troas.*

6. *And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.*

7. *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, (ready to depart on the morrow,) and continued his speech until midnight.*

By this time the worship of the Christian congregations had assumed a regular form, not different from that which is followed at this day.

¹ Rom. xvi. 21—23. Col. iv. 7.

The historian's words intimate, that on this occasion, when Paul preached for the last time at Troas, it was the Lord's day, and the sacrament was administered. The *first* day of the week, and not the *seventh*, was now the sabbath. It might be otherwise, for a while, with the converted Jews, but the church in general transferred their day of rest from the last day of the week, on which Jesus had lain in the grave, to the first day, on which he had risen from the dead. No account remains of the mode in which this change was ordered. We may be sure that it was directed by the apostles, and we know that they were under the direction of the Holy Ghost. The title, too, was altered. The Jewish term, *sabbath*, was gradually laid aside, and a term introduced which would be everywhere understood, *the Lord's-day*. Such it is in every sense. It is the day which the Lord Jehovah, when he made the world, reserved as his own. "The seventh day," the seventh part of time, "is the sabbath of the Lord thy God." "He blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it." And it is the day on which the Lord Jesus consummated the great work of redemption, and triumphed over death and the grave. It is the Lord's day, because through it, the Creator maintained his connexion with his reasonable creatures. He "gave them his sabbaths, that they might be a sign between him and them." It is the Lord's day, because it restored a rebellious world to its Creator. It is, therefore, the day which the Lord hath

made ; and we may justly rejoice and be glad in it.

On this day, then, *the disciples assembled together*. While no law enjoined a sabbath, protected, or even permitted a sabbath, it was not possible that the day should be kept generally or altogether holy. But we evidently perceive that Christians observed it.² And now they were assembled *to break bread* ; to commemorate their Lord's death, by partaking together of the supper of his body broken for them, and his blood shed. Paul was among them, *ready to depart on the morrow*. Though Ephesus had been the chief place of his residence for three years, yet from time to time he had visited other districts ; and at Troas he had known and seen enough to wind round the heart those strongest ties, which are formed by the giving and receiving spiritual benefits. Duty now summoned him elsewhere, not knowing whither he might be directed, but knowing this, that he was not likely to see again the disciples whom he was now addressing, till the apostle met his hearers at the judgment-day. It was a moment of great interest. All seem alike to have felt it so. Paul *continued his speech until midnight*. He could not lose this last occasion of rehearsing to them *the whole counsel of God*, and showing how it all centered in " Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He could not forbear enforcing upon them once more that which had been

² John xx. 1. 19. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. Rev. i. 11.

the great subject of his public and private ministrations, *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*. Time passed away, as they were thus engaged, and neither the preacher nor the hearers complained of weariness. The one was declaring, the others were receiving, the words of eternal life.

But we are never long allowed to forget the infirmities of nature. Something is sure to remind us how “the corruptible body presseth down the soul.”

8. *And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.*

9. *And there sat in the window a certain young man named Eutyehus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.*

10. *And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him, said, Trouble not yourselves: for his life is in him.*

11. *When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.*

12. *And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.*

Their comfort on this occasion would be in pro-

³ Modern travellers show how, from the style of building and manner of collecting companies in that country still, the accident here related was not unlikely to take place. They also remark, that the neighbourhood abounds with oil, for the ready supply of *many lights*: that the Christians might not be accused of holding secret assemblies.

portion to their alarm and sorrow. The circumstance, distressing in itself, was made more distressing by the suspicion which would be excited, and the slanders which might ensue. It was one of the persecutions endured by the early Christians, that evil reports were spread concerning their assemblies. All this would rush into their minds when Eutychus *was taken up dead*: and all this alarm would subside when Paul restored him, and *they brought the young man alive*.

But a more lasting comfort would remain with them. How sure a proof was here, that God was watching over their faith! How undeniable a testimony that Paul's words were the words, not of man, but of God! It would be, as it were, the seal of his ministry: and as long as Eutychus survived, or any one survived of those who had been present in this upper chamber, the impression of the event would remain to confirm their faith, and support it under all its trials.

We, too, may look upon it in the same light, and be *not a little comforted*. We see in it a proof of the truth of our Lord's promise, and an example of the way in which it is made good. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." ⁴

⁴ Matt. xviii. 20.

LECTURE LXXII.

PAUL'S PARTING ADDRESS TO THE ELDERS AT MILETUS.—A. D. 60.

ACTS xx. 13—24.

13. *And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul : for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.*

14. *And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene.*

15. *And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios ; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium ; and the next day we came to Miletus.*

16. *For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia : for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.*

17. *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.*

18. *And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,*

19. *Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews :*

20. *And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,*

21. *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

It is affecting to find St. Paul thus calling upon the elders of the church, the elders of his own appointment over churches of his own planting, to bear witness to his faithfulness. He speaks, indeed, as one *serving the Lord with all humility of mind*. He appeals to them, as knowing the character of his teaching. He had *kept back nothing that was profitable unto them*. He might have spoken, not as pleasing God, but men. But he did not; he spoke, “not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth the heart.”¹

The human mind, it seems, was the same then as now. The hearer might wish some truth to be kept back: the preacher might be tempted to indulge the hearer’s wish. The prophet might prophesy falsely, because the people loved to have it so.²

Paul, however, *kept back nothing that was profitable, but showed and taught them both publicly and from house to house*.

We have seen how he *taught publicly*. Wherever there were Jewish synagogues, these he entered, and expounding the law and the prophets, “showed from the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.” When, as at Ephesus, he could no longer attend the synagogue without danger, or when, as at Athens, there was no Jewish synagogue, he

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 4.

² See Jer. v. 31.

used the most convenient place of meeting, as the school of Tyrannus ; or even disputed in places of public concourse “ with them that met with him.”³ Thus he acted as what he was, a herald, one who has something to announce ; and the subject of his announcement was, Man a sinner, and Christ a Saviour : *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

But public preaching must not supersede private instruction. It opens the way for it ; but does not supply it. The one draws the bow at a venture ; the other carries the arrow home, and lodges it in the heart—not to wound, but to heal ; not to destroy, but to save. Therefore he taught *both publicly and from house to house*. He had thus opportunity of pressing his doctrine more closely upon the conscience, and also of explaining it more accurately. He could resolve doubts, as well as declare truths. He could reach the individual case : and prove to every heart which “ knew its own bitterness,” the nature of that “ grace of God which had appeared unto all men.”

Thus he fulfilled his mission, *to the Jews, and also to the Greeks*. Both, it seems, required the same. Both required *repentance towards God*. The Jews had offended against the law which God had revealed to them : the Greeks had offended against “ the law written in their hearts.” So that “ there was no difference ; for that all had sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”⁴

³ See xix. 9 ; xvii. 17.

⁴ See the argument in the Epistle to the Romans, ii. and iii.

All, though in various degrees of guilt, were to come before God in one common attitude as sinners. But as repentant sinners, intending “to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking henceforth in his holy ways.” And, also, as sinners who sought acceptance with God, through *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Repentance towards God was to lead to faith towards Christ Jesus. Sorrow for sin was to produce love of the Saviour. The law, convincing them of sin, was to bring them to Him who takes away sin. They were shown their condemnation in the sight of God, that they might embrace his offer of salvation. And if they were thus taught *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, nothing was kept back which was profitable for them.*

22. *And now behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there :*

23. *Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me.*

24. *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

The exact nature of his trials was not revealed to Paul. All that *the Holy Ghost witnessed*, was what from the first he had been taught to expect. From the first he had been shown “how great things he must suffer for Christ’s sake.”⁵

⁵ ix. 16.

It is mercy to man that a map of his wanderings is not laid before him. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Sufficient also is the provision against evil, if He is with us whom Paul was proclaiming: if we are able to say, through whatever unknown ways we may be called, “Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”⁶ This was Paul’s support: he had a certain duty to fulfil, a certain course to follow: and he set out to meet the trials of every day in sure confidence of “doing all things through Christ who strengthened him.” And this alone was his desire, *that he might finish his course with joy*. As he more fully describes his state of mind, when writing to the Philippian disciples, (Phil. iii. 13,) “This one thing I do; forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

His was a peculiar course. But so is every man’s. Every man’s condition is a course to himself, requiring to be run, like Paul’s, with patience unto the end. Every situation, every relation of life, has its own duties, and its own difficulties. Every individual heart has its own temptations. We proceed, *not knowing the things that shall befall us; save this, that the Holy Ghost witnesseth*, that “strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life:” but that “God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are

⁶ Ps. xxi. 4.

able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.”⁷

Certainly we should set one object before us, and keep it constantly in view, that we *finish our course with joy*. And the way to attain this, is to *testify the gospel of the grace of God*, if not as Paul by his words, as Paul by his life and character. Then shall *none of those things move us*, which might otherwise disturb or harass. They cannot hinder our finishing our course with joy, if they do not divert us from it. Nay, they may even further our progress. Temptations, when resisted and overcome, add strength to the soul; leave it more settled than before. Tribulations past are an earnest of future support. Every turn in the course, when passed successfully, leaves the way shorter, and brings the prize nearer: till at last the Christian may say, “I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day.”⁸

⁷ 1 Cor. x. 13.

· ⁸ 2 Tim. iv. 11.

LECTURE LXXIII.

PAUL'S DISCOURSE CONTINUED,—A. D. 60.

ACTS XX. 25—31.

25. *And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.*

26. *Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.*

27. *For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*

In the reign of Ahab over Israel, when he and Jehoshaphat were conferring together as allies, a question arose as to the expediency of making war against the king of Syria. The prophets were consulted. And they said, (1 Kings xxii. 12,) “Go up to Ramoth Gilead, and prosper: for the Lord will deliver it into the hands of the king.” This they spoke without inquiry of the Lord. They spoke what they knew their king would desire to hear. And when Ahab perished in the battle, it could not be said of them, that they were *pure from his blood*. This could be truly spoken of Micaiah alone, who said to Ahab, “I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd:” and who publicly proclaimed, “If thou

¹ xviii. 6.

return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. Hearken, O people, every one of you." Thus he *took them all to record that day, that he was pure from the blood of Ahab.*

Paul here affirms the same concerning himself. As when he addressed the Jews at Corinth, the awful words of Ezekiel again occur to him. Had he "warned the wicked to save his life?" Had he "warned the righteous man that he sin not?"² Then, and not otherwise, he was *pure from the blood of all men*: he had "delivered his soul." He calls them all to witness that he had done this: for he had *not shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God. He had kept back nothing that was profitable unto them.*

Considering him, as he was, "an ambassador of Christ," sent to the rebellious subjects of their heavenly King, there are two ways in which he might have been unfaithful. He might hesitate to declare, in words of sufficient plainness, their guilt and danger. He might scruple to say to the wicked, "Thou shalt surely die." He might scruple to say to his self-righteous countrymen, that the Jew and the Gentile were alike guilty before God.

Then, on the other hand, he might fail in conveying the offer of the King's forgiveness. He might keep back the message of mercy; that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them:" he might have failed to "pray them in Christ's stead" with due earnestness, "Be ye reconciled unto God."³

² See Ezek. iii. 18—21.

³ 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.

But now he *takes them to record*, that he had not failed in any part of his commission : he had *not shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God* : that as “ by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous : ” “ that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” ⁴

And now he impresses upon those whom he was leaving as teachers and rulers of the flock, that they watch over their charge as men “ who must give account : ” as stewards whom God expected to find faithful.

28. *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

29. *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.*

30. *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

The prayer of the Lord Jesus for his apostles whom he left to carry on the work which he had begun, was not that they should be “ taken out of the world,” but that they might be “ delivered from the evil ” of the world.⁵ They could not be free from danger and from trial . but they might be enabled to resist and overcome it. So Paul

⁴ Rom. v. 19—21.

⁵ John xvii. 15.

here looks forward to those evils which he knew must assail the church. There would be enemies from without: *grievous wolves entering in, not sparing the flock*; and there would be treachery at home: *of their own selves should men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.*"⁶ Against all these the elders were to guard the church of God, which he had purchased with his own blood. He who "in the beginning was with God, and was God," had taken unto himself a mortal life, that he might give it "a ransom for many." O how does the richness of the price display the value of the purchased possession! *The church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood!* For we "are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."⁷

In proportion to the price paid, is the importance and necessity of watching over the treasure. The pearl of great price must not be left unguarded. And so the apostle adds,

31. *Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

Such was his sense of the truths with which he was charged: such his views of their inestimable

⁶ See 1 Tim. i. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 18. See also 2 Pet. ii. 1—3.
1 John ii. 18.

⁷ 1 Pet. i. 18.

importance to man. The picture which he draws of himself goes beyond even a parent's interest. No love could surpass it. "In season, and out of season," at the time assigned to man for labour, and even at the time assigned him for rest from his labours, Paul was still seeking opportunity to warn, to instruct, "to exhort and rebuke with all authority" and doctrine. And so sincere were his feelings, that they urged him even to tears: such tears as his Lord had shed over the impending ruin of Jerusalem:⁸ or as ran down the eyes of the Psalmist, when he saw the laws of God dishonoured.⁹

How does such earnestness reprove the indifference with which sin and unbelief are too commonly regarded.¹ He who had the clearest revelation of their consequences, felt those consequences so deeply, that he could not be at ease unless *warning every one night and day with tears*. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed, lest at any time we let them slip. For how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

⁸ Luke xix. 41.

⁹ See Ps. cxix. 136.

¹ Heb. ii. 1-3.

LECTURE LXXIV.

THE CONCLUSION OF PAUL'S DISCOURSE. HE
LEAVES MILETUS.—A. D. 60.

ACTS xx. 32—38.

32. *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

33. *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.*

34. *Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.*

35. *I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring, ye ought to support the weak ; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

The father taken prematurely from his family commits the guardianship of his children to his wisest and dearest friend. Other duties now separated St. Paul from his christian family in this part of Asia ; his children in the faith. But there is a guardianship under which he can confidently leave them. He *commends them to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build them up as holy temples to the Lord.* He says *to build them up*, because the foundation was already laid. We

¹ One of our blessed Lord's remarks, not recorded by the Evangelist, but remembered by his disciples.

were before told how it was laid. It was laid in “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.”² Those whom he was addressing had been once “dead in trespasses and sins, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” From these they had now turned, “to serve the living and true God.” This was *repentance*. They were expecting a heavenly inheritance, through him who had purchased it with his own blood ; “even Jesus, who had delivered them from the wrath to come.” This was *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. And the elders who were now bearing Paul, and the churches over which they were overseers, had been placed upon this foundation.

A foundation is not laid without a purpose. It is useless unless something be raised upon it. And the foundation of repentance and faith is laid, that on it a holy life may be built up. The will of God was, their sanctification. They were called to holiness. They were called to disinterestedness, after the example which Paul himself had set them. They were called to brotherly-kindness and charity, and not to self-indulgence or covetousness. And this sanctification is produced by the Spirit acting on the heart through the word. *The word of God’s grace* alone can build the Christian up as a spiritual temple, living to his service and glory. *The word* can do this, and nothing else. Surrounded as we are by temptation ; contending as we do, not only against flesh and blood, but against spiritual enemies ever watchful to destroy : with so

² See Ephes. ix. 1, 2.

many examples on every side of those who live only to this world and to themselves:—amid dangers like these, what but the word of God constantly studied as a rule, constantly referred to as a standard, can keep us from “drawing back unto perdition?”

It comforted the apostle, that he left this with them : that he could *commend them to God and to the word of his grace*, through which they might endure unto the end, and receive *an inheritance among all them that are sanctified*.

This, he says, *the word is able to give*. THE word of God is, as it were, the title-deed by which the Christian knows what he is heir to. Why does he dare to look towards heaven? Because THE WORD assures him, that there are those for whom God has prepared a kingdom. And how dares he hope, that he is among that number? THE WORD supplies him with the evidence of his title. The evidence of his title is, that he is *sanctified*: that “a new heart and a right spirit” have been wrought in him by the Spirit of God. The evidence of his title is not merely that he is baptized: though baptism is an essential mean of sanctification. The evidence is not that he eats and drinks at the Lord’s table: though it is an essential part of sanctification “to show forth the Lord’s death till he come.” Still the mark of heirship is no outward rite. The inheritance is for *them that are sanctified*. And sanctification has its seat within, governing and directing the thoughts and words and works. Sanctification is no single act or quality, but it pervades

the whole heart, and influences the whole man ; regulates his desires, rules his designs, inspires his secret affections, and guides his outward actions. To be “ poor in spirit ;” to be “ pure in heart ;” to be “ meek ;” to be “ merciful ;” to “ hunger and thirst after righteousness ;”—this is to be sanctified : and blessed are they who are thus sanctified, for theirs is the *inheritance*—“ theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Leaving upon their minds this last assurance, the apostle departs ; but first sets the seal to his exhortation.

36. *And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.*

37. *And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him.*

38. *Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.*

Paul was dear to these persons beyond common and ordinary friendship, because the benefits they had received from him were more than ordinary benefits. And they knew not what his departure might cost them ; how much of that spiritual blessing which they now enjoyed might be impaired, when they had no longer his instructions, his advice, his exhortations. Unwilling to lose a moment, *they accompanied him to the ship.* There they *must* part. The time will come on earth when dearest friends must be torn from one another. They look forward to a state where nothing shall separate them ;—nothing give occasion for the words which

Paul had spoken, and which were above all grievous—that *they should see his face no more.*

Still there is One who even in this world cannot be separated from us ; who will be with us in all circumstances, and in every country ; who will not be parted from us even when that gulf is to be crossed which is our passage to eternity. To Him Paul commends those whom he loved,—saying, *Now, brethren, I commend you to God.* And the words of God to his people are, “ I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

LECTURE LXXV.

PAUL VOYAGING TOWARDS JERUSALEM VISITS
TYRE AND CESAREA.—A. D. 60.

ACTS xxi. 1—14.

1. *And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara :*

2. *And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.*

3. *Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre : for there the ship was to unlade her burden.*

4. *And finding disciples,¹ we tarried there seven days : who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.*

5. *And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way ; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city : and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.*

6. *And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship ; and they returned home again.*

The word of God had now been so widely spread in Asia, that in all the principal towns they could meet with fellow-Christians. And when they found Christians they found friends ; friends delighted to receive them and anxious for their welfare ; so that if Paul had listened to their forebodings he would not have pursued his course towards Jerusalem. This, however, was determined on. Nothing remained, but mutually to commend one another to God. So *they kneeled down on the shore and prayed.* It is in such seasons that the privilege of prayer is sincerely felt. They had affections which they were unable to indulge ; they had apprehensions which they could not conceal. But there was one God and Father of all, made theirs by “ the adoption that is in Christ Jesus.” He could be with the disciples at Tyre, and with Paul at Jerusalem ; and in that bond they might be united, though distant from each other ; and in that confidence

¹ Rather, *having found out the disciples ; ἀνευροντες.* (Scholefield.) *Through the spirit* of prophecy which these disciples possessed, they foresaw the danger which threatened Paul at Jerusalem. Had they spoken under the immediate direction of the Spirit, Paul would have listened to them. But he was fully assured of the will of God in this journey.

they might be comforted, even in the prospect of tribulation or danger.

7. *And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.*

8. *And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cesarea : and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist,² which was one of the seven ; and abode with him.*

9. *And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy*

10. *And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus.³*

11. *And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.*

12. *And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.*

13. *Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart ? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*

14. *And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.*

² Evangelist, or preacher of the gospel, as well as deacon. So he had proved to the Ethiopian, chap. viii. After that transaction "he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cesarea:" where we now meet with him again, after twenty-six years. His four daughters, it appears, were endued with the gift of prophecy. In fulfilment of Joel ii. 28, "Thy servants and hand-maidens shall prophesy."

³ Probably the same Agabus who had foretold the dearth which happened in the days of Claudius, xi. 28.

Paul was not allowed to doubt whether it was *the will of the Lord* that he should proceed to Jerusalem. Therefore dangers could not affect his resolution. He had long made up his mind to live and die *for the sake of the Lord Jesus* : that is, for the sake of that which had brought the Lord Jesus into the world : for the sake of those interests in which he is so mercifully concerned, for the sake of serving his cause, and adding fresh triumphs to his cross. He had long known that the path which he had chosen was not the path of pleasantness or safety. But the smooth and easy path was not the object for which he cared. His object was, that he might “ finish his course with joy,” and obtain “ the crown of glory.” And therefore he was *ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord Jesus.*

Had he on this occasion yielded to the fears and entreaties of the disciples, he would have cast a reproach upon his own character, and marred the effect of all the testimony which he had borne. He had always taught that those must bear the cross who aspire to the crown ; that they who suffer with Christ are they who shall reign with him ; that “ if we deny him, he will deny us.” When therefore he repulsed those who would *weep and break his heart*, he spoke in the same spirit as the Lord himself⁴ when he rebuked his affectionate but mistaken apostle, saying, “ Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me.” Wouldest thou persuade me to desert my purpose of bearing in my

⁴ Matt. xvi. 23.

own body the sins of the world? And so St Paul. Why persuade me to abandon the choice which I have made, and the hope which I am enjoying? Shall I forfeit the evidence which I bear in my own heart, and invalidate the proof which I would exhibit to the world, that “I know in whom I have believed,” and that “he is able” to support me unto the end? I have testified both publicly, and also from house to house, that he whose gospel I proclaim will “raise our vile body, that it may be made like unto his glorious body.” But who will attend to my words, if they see me unwilling to trust my own body to the grave in confidence of such a resurrection? But I am not unwilling: *I am ready*: “he is faithful that hath promised;” and rather than cease to declare the truth, wherever it may please the Lord to send me, I will go to prison and to death.

This resolution of Paul is recorded as our example, though in very different circumstances. The principle which governed him, is the principle which must govern every Christian. Every Christian must be settled in his mind to do whatever he is called to do *for the sake of the Lord Jesus*: must be prepared, like him, to give evidence of his faith. The evidence which Paul gave, was his readiness to suffer bonds or death. The evidence for us to give, is a living rather than a dying testimony: the devotion of ourselves, our souls and bodies, to the service of our heavenly Lord: the employment of all our powers, our abilities, our influence, our endeavours, to fulfil his will and advance his glory.

This is the distinction between other men and the faithful servant of Christ. The natural inquiry is, How shall I enlarge my store? How enrich my family? How raise my reputation? How enjoy most ease and pleasure? The servant of Christ has another object. How shall I prove to my own conscience that “the life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God?” How can I best, in my particular station, lay myself out in his service;—how most successfully promote his cause in the world? Let others “halt between two opinions.” “As for me, I and my house will serve the Lord.” What mean ye to scoff and break my resolution? My purpose is, “whether I live, to live unto the Lord; or whether I die, to die unto the Lord: that, living or dying, I may be the Lord’s.”

Such was the faith which was settled in Paul’s mind as the principle by which he lived. The occasion was sudden on which he uttered this resolution. Agabus came forward unexpectedly, and prophesied that bonds and afflictions awaited him. And on this sudden trial, the state of his mind appeared. What if bonds and persecutions are threatening me? *I am ready, not to be bound only, but to die at Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord Jesus.*

Is there such a settled principle in our hearts? Are we able to give an answer like this when any sudden temptation comes on us? Are we able to say, I am ready to be scorned and wondered at by those around me, rather than offend or deny my Saviour? I am ready to decline the pleasures which

others enjoy, to renounce the advantages which others seize, rather than risk offending him, who has taught me to “seek first the kingdom of God,” and to “lay up treasure in heaven?”

It is often difficult thus to preserve the even tenor of a Christian’s way. But it is a difficulty which must be manfully encountered. Paul found it a trial when his friends wept before him, and entreated him not to put his life in danger. But he did not give way in compliance with the tears and entreaties of his friends. He rather said, *What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? Ye may grieve me, but ye cannot move me; for I am ready not to be bound only, but to die at Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord Jesus.*

Study to establish within yourselves the same inward principle, which shall be prepared to start forward and make the like reply to every unworthy suggestion of your own heart, or of Satan, or of the world. Reply to “flesh and blood,”—To deny myself, and take up my cross daily; that is to be Christ’s disciple. Reply to Satan, “It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” Reply to the world,—“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”

LECTURE LXXVI.

PAUL ARRIVES AT JERUSALEM. CONFORMS TO ONE OF THE CEREMONIES OF THE LAW.—A. D. 60.

ACTS xxi. 15—26.

15. *And after those days we took up our carriages,¹ and went up to Jerusalem.*

16. *There went with us also certain of the disciples of Cesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.*

17. *And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.*

18. *And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.*

19. *And when he had saluted them, he declared² particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.*

The disciples of Cesarea had remonstrated with Paul, that he might not go up to Jerusalem. So the apostles would have dissuaded the Lord Jesus. They said unto him, “Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee: and goest thou thither again?” But when “he stedfastly set his face toward Jerusalem,” Thomas “said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.” And in like manner the Christians at Ce-

¹ ἀνασκευασαμενοι. Having taken up our baggage, viz., for the purpose of removal.

² See John xi. 8—16.

sarea. They would have diverted Paul from the journey: but when that was resolved upon, some of them went with him, and provided for his comfortable reception at the house of Mnason. On their arrival, their first business was to visit the brethren, and especially the apostle James, who had continued at Jerusalem and presided over the church there. The great subject of interest was the progress of the gospel. What success does God vouchsafe to the ministry in Asia? Has “the word free course,” and are many turned to the Lord? The tidings which Paul brought were cheering. *He declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.* Since his last visit from Antioch, eight years before, what a change had been wrought in Asia, from Alexandria to Troas, and in Greece from Philippi to Corinth? In the places where it was said, They are not my people: it is now said, They are the people of God.³ “For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth: so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”⁴

While affairs at a distance were so prosperous, they must also consider things at home. There were jealous feelings among the Jewish brethren, which did not exist among the Gentiles. And Paul had not escaped their suspicion. They thought him ill-affected towards the law which they themselves esteemed so important, and still scrupulously observed. They knew that upon this point he had

³ See Hos. ii. 23.

⁴ Is. lx. 11.

withstood Peter, and written strongly to the Galatians ; and James foresaw that “ the apostle of the Gentiles ” would not be regarded with favour by the believing Jews. To obviate this disagreement among brethren, he proposes a plan by which the prejudice against Paul might be allayed.

20. *And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe ; and they are all zealous of the law :*

21. *And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.*

22. *What is it therefore ? the multitude must needs come together : for they will hear that thou art come.*

23. *Do therefore this that we say to thee : We have four men which have a vow on them ;*⁵

⁵ “ There were always persons at Jerusalem, especially at the great festivals, who took on them the vow of a Nazarite : *i. e.* they vowed to abstain from wine, or any fermented liquor, for a certain number of days. When the term was over, they were to bring the prescribed offering to the priest : till which time the hair of their head was not allowed to be cut. Numb. vi. 14. The offering was expensive ; and it sometimes happened that at the end of the term a poor man could not provide it, so as to become clear from his vow. The elders happened to know of four Christians who were thus circumstanced ; had taken on themselves a vow which they were unable to discharge. So they suggested to Paul that he should take on himself the same vow, and then be *at charges with them*,—assist them to provide their offering, that *they might shave their heads, i. e.* put a period to their vow of abstinence. This would be publicly known, and show that Paul ought not to be accused, as if he rashly opposed the ceremonial law.”—Burton, lect. viii. 247. See also an useful note in Doddridge.

24. *Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads : and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing ; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.*

25. *As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.*

Paul saw nothing in this to which he need object. The case was very different from that of the apostle Peter, who would have “compelled the Gentiles to live as do the Jews :” requiring them to obey the law of Moses. This Paul withstood, “because he was to be blamed.”⁶ And the brethren here disclaim any *such purpose, saying, as touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing.* But though the law was no longer necessary, it had not become sinful. And Paul being now amongst those who held the law in reverence, might properly conciliate their good opinion by complying with its ceremonies. He forced no one to observe that which divine authority no longer required : he would himself observe that which others revered, and which divine authority had not expressly forbidden.

26. *Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.*

⁶ See Galat. ii. 11—15.

The case was difficult in which Paul had here to act. There were dangers on both sides. On one side there was danger, lest he should needlessly offend the Jewish disciples, and so cause dissensions. On the other side there was danger lest he should encourage superstition, and uphold a law which was now “waxing old and ready to vanish away.”⁷ Paul thought the first danger greatest, and for the sake of peace and good will, followed the counsel of the elders. “To the Jews he became as a Jew, that he might gain the Jews ; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that he might gain them that are under the law. And this he did for the gospel’s sake.”⁸

Human life abounds with difficulties of the same kind. There is fear of giving needless offence. There is fear of making undue compromise. With most persons, the last danger is the greatest. Nature commonly inclines to yield rather than to resist : to fall in with the current rather than oppose it. And, speaking generally, the purpose which Paul had in view, “that he might gain the more,” that he might bring more over to God ;—this purpose is best answered by a steady and decided line of conduct. Nothing, in the end, obtains so much influence as consistent adherence to known principle. Then men see what we are : stablished and settled on sure ground : not double-minded, carried away by every wind, unstable in all our ways. Paul was thus firm and uncompromising in the

⁷ Heb. viii. 13.

⁸ 1 Cor. ix. 20—23 ; x. 32, 33.

whole tenor of his life, though he would “give none offence,” neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles.⁹ And he has recorded for our encouragement the comfort which he derived from this consistency. “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience ; that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.”¹

LECTURE LXXVII.

PAUL IS ASSAULTED IN THE TEMPLE, AND
RESCUED BY THE ROMAN OFFICER.—A. D. 60.

Acts xxi. 27—40.

27. *And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,*

28. *Crying out, Men of Israel, help. This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place : and further, brought Greeks also into the temple ; and hath polluted this holy place.*

29. *(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)*

It may be often right to make concessions, as Paul had judged it to be on this occasion. But

⁹ 1 Cor. x. 32.

¹ 2 Cor. i. 12.

frequently they are vain and useless, as also in this case it proved. Paul had entered into the temple with those who had a vow upon them, for the express purpose of escaping from the prejudice of his countrymen. But his presence in the temple provoked the very evil which he desired to avoid. *The Jews which were of Asia*, whom the religious festival had brought up to Jerusalem, came thither with all those bitter feelings which they had indulged against Paul for many years, whilst he had been preaching the gospel in their neighbourhood. We saw an instance of those feelings, in the charge made against Peter, “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.” It was a still heavier reproach against Paul, that his language was, “In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature.” He treated men who were neither “under the law” by birth, nor made obedient to the law by proselytism, as if they could be heirs of the divine favour. So they cry out, *Men of Israel, help; this is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and against the law, and against this place.* It was the very accusation which Paul himself had encouraged against Stephen many years before. “This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.”¹ Now Paul was involved in the same charge. Though the Lord Jesus had declared, “Think not that I am come to destroy the

¹ Acts vi. 13.

law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Though Paul affirmed, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Nay: but we establish the law." Still he must labour under misrepresentation as an innovator and a reformer. Nay, they lay to his charge things that he knew not. They impute to him that he had *brought Greeks into the temple, and polluted this holy place.*² They had seen Trophimus with him *in the city*: they presumed that he was with him in the temple also.

Religious truth has always been liable to these difficulties. In all ages, many, like these Jews of Asia, have brought charges against those who differed from them, which have had no other foundation than their own prejudices. Often, too, has it happened, that others, like Paul, have been treated with especial enmity, because they have changed former opinions, believing the things which once they denied. This consideration will lead all reasonable men to deal moderately and candidly with opponents. It will be a ground for calm inquiry—for complying with the precept, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment."³ "Charity hopeth all things."

No such precept was attended to, no such moderation used, in the case of Paul.

² The Gentiles were only admitted into a certain court which was separated from the Jews by a partition wall. To pass that barrier, we learn from Philo, was a capital offence.

³ John vii. 24.

30 *And all the city was moved, and the people ran together : and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple : and forthwith the doors were shut.*

31. *And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.*

32. *Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them : and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.*

33. *Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains : and demanded who he was, and what he had done.*

34. *And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude : and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.⁴*

35. *And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.*

36. *For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.*

37. *And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?*

38. *Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? ⁵*

39. *But Paul said, I am a man, which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city : and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.*

40. *And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with his hand unto the people :*

⁴ The castle of Antonia, which overlooked the temple, being built at an angle of it.

⁵ An insurrection of this kind is mentioned by Josephus, Ant. xv. s. 6. It was quelled by Felix.

and when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying.

Paul had good reason for protesting, "I die daily." One while in perils by his own countrymen, another time "in perils by the heathen;" one while in perils in the wilderness, and now in peril in the city; he "bore the sentence of death" about with him,⁶ and had constant reason to believe that it would be carried into execution. But "the hairs of his head were all numbered." And his hour was not yet come. Once more, God made the magistrate a minister to him for good. The captain repressed the violence of the people, when they had first *drawn him out of the temple*, (that it might not be profaned by blood,) and then *went about to kill him*. The providence of God so ordered it, that intelligence of the uproar reached the governor of the castle in time to save Paul's life: and though he knew not whom he was assisting, or what cause he was serving, his duty was to quiet tumult, and restrain the violence of a lawless multitude.

In fact, he supposed that he was saving Paul from outrage, in order that he might be executed by regular justice. In the general excitement, rumour had reached him that this was an Egyptian adventurer, who three years before had *led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers*. Hence his surprise when Paul addressed him in the Greek language. So great was his astonishment, and so much was he affected by

⁶ 2 Cor. i. 9; and xi. 26.

Paul's manner, that he *gave him licence to speak to the people.*

Hopeless it certainly was, to speak to the people while in such a state of mind. But Paul would not despair. His heart's desire and prayer for his countrymen was, that they "might be saved."⁷ They attacked him with "carnal weapons." God might make his words a spiritual instrument, "to break the rock in pieces." At all events, let him act in the spirit which directed Ezekiel of old, (Ezek. ii. 5, 6,) "Thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall they know that there has been a prophet among them."

⁷ Rom. x. i.

LECTURE LXXVIII.

PAUL'S DEFENCE OF HIMSELF TO THE PEOPLE.

A. D. 60.

Acts xxii. 1—16.

1. *Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.*

2. *(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence ; and he saith)*

3. *I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel,¹ and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.*

4. *And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.*

5. *As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders : from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.*

There was evident reason why Paul should commence with this statement of his former life and opinions. He would show that he had not lightly or hastily embraced the faith which he was now so actively proclaiming. Far as his hearers might be

¹ As the scholar sitting below his master. So Mary “ sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard his word.”

from the same faith, they were not farther than he himself had once been. Bitterly as they were enraged against him as a Christian, they were not more bitter than he had formerly shown himself, when he *persecuted that way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.* Were they *zealous toward God?* So was he. Did they reverence *the law of the fathers?* So had he been *brought up at the feet of Gamaliel*, “being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of the fathers, above many his equals in his own nation.”² “But what things were gain to him,” what by birth and education he had most trusted in, those he had long given up; he had “suffered the loss of all things for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.”³

So complete was the change which had been wrought in his mind. But so complete a change is not wrought in the mind of a reasonable man, except on sure and solid grounds. Paul was bold, but he was not rash. He was active and zealous; but he was not wild or enthusiastic. He was led to the conduct which he pursued, not by imagination, but by conviction: he did not mistake darkness for light, or shadow for substance, or fancy for reality. Nothing of that had appeared throughout his history. But what was he, that he should “withstand God?” He proceeds to describe the circumstances which he had been unable to resist; which had prevailed with him, and changed the whole bent of his soul.

² Gal. i. 14.

³ Phil. iii. 8, 9.

6. *And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.*

7. *And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

8. *And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.*

9. *And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.*

10. *And I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.*

11. *And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.*

12. *And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwell there,*

13. *Came unto me, and stood, and said, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.*

14. *And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.*

15. *For thou shalt be his witness unto all men, of what thou hast seen and heard.*

Thus Ananias was instructed to complete the work which the light and the voice from heaven had begun. That had arrested Paul, and stopped his sinful career. Ananias directs him into the new path which was designed for him. *The God of our fathers hath chosen thee*, that in a miraculous

manner, and not as other men, thou shouldest see *that Just One*, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and *hear the voice of his mouth*. But not for thine own sake, or thine own salvation merely. The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, *that thou mightest be his witness*, a peculiar witness, *of what thou hast seen and heard*: mightest know what is *his will*, namely, that “the gospel of the kingdom” should be everywhere proclaimed, that as many as receive it may “not perish, but have everlasting life.”

16. *And now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*

Why tarriest thou? There must be no delay. He that is to lead others to the fountain, must first drink himself of the waters. Thou art convinced. It is time to act upon thy conviction. *Arise, and be baptized*. “He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.”⁴ To be baptized, is the act of faith: the sign on man’s part of his acceptance of that offer, his entrance into that covenant of grace to which God has invited him. Neither is it a mere sign alone. It has been written, (Ezek. xxxvi. 25,) “Then will I sprinkle clear water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you.” After the same figure, the water of baptism shall *wash away thy sins*: shall cleanse the heart from what defiles it, as water cleanses the body from defilement. Therefore *arise, and be*

⁴ Mark xvi. 16.

baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord : invoking him, whose name thou hast hitherto blasphemed, that thou mayest be cleansed from all sin by his blood, which was shed to take away sin. So shalt thou be “washed, be sanctified, be justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

Thus it has pleased God to make baptism the appointed means through which his mercy is conveyed to man. Under the old dispensation there had been an outward rite, marking those who were within from those who were without the covenant. And so under the new. *Arise, and be baptized.* The ordinance had been prescribed to Abraham, (Gen. xvii. 10,) “This is my covenant which ye shall keep. Every man child among you shall be circumcised.” He who neglects this, “that soul shall be cut off from his people : he hath broken my covenant.” So now : the command is not only to repent, or to believe ; but, “repent and *be baptized* in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Baptism, therefore, places man in a new state : places him in a state of covenant with God : restores to his favour those who had fallen from it when sin entered into the world. “As in Adam all died :” were brought under the wrath of God : so “in Christ,” the second Adam, “shall all be made alive.” And the appointed channel through which this mercy flows, is *baptism*.

With what earnestness should parents pray that this ordinance may permanently bless their chil-

dren ! That they may not “ receive the grace of God in vain ! ” Should any suppose that the rite can convey no benefit, because the infant is incapable of seeking or desiring one : there is proof in this transaction that such scruple would rest on no good grounds. Saul might have argued : I repent ; I believe ; I am ready to do the will of God : what need to be baptized ? What profit can the outward ordinance bestow ? Can water cleanse the heart ? Can “ the putting away the defilement of the body ” give “ the answer of a good conscience toward God ? ” ⁵

For such argument there was no place. He must *arise and be baptized*. “ For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” ⁶

Sad experience shows that the sinfulness which is washed away may be again contracted : that they who are “ buried with Christ by baptism,” ⁷ do not always arise to “ newness of life.” The more need have we to pray, that baptism may be indeed the grave of the old nature, and that out of that grave there may be a resurrection to the “ new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness : ” ⁸ that to all who are dedicated to God through the covenant of baptism, may be given “ power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh ; and so remain Christ’s faithful soldiers and servants to their lives’ end.” ⁹

⁵ 1 Pet. iii. 21.

⁶ Matt. iii. 15.

⁷ Rom. vi. 4.

⁸ Chap. iv. 24.

⁹ See Baptismal Service.

LECTURE LXXIX.

PAUL, ASSAULTED BY THE JEWS, IS CARRIED
INTO THE CASTLE. — A. D. 60.

ACTS xxii. 17—30.

17. *And it came to pass, that when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance ;*

18. *And saw him [the Lord]¹ saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem : for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.*

19. *And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that beliered on thee.*

20. *And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him*

21. *And he said unto me, Depart : for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.*

22. *And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth : for it is not fit that he should live.*

Abraham ventured to intercede with the Almighty in behalf of Sodom, (Gen. xviii. 24,) “ Peradventure there are fifty righteous within the city : wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein ? ”

So Paul ventured to intercede for his country-

¹ See verse xiv.

men. He would have willingly laboured among them in preference. He had “great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart respecting his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.”² They had known his former manner of life: how he had been among the most active in “persecuting this way unto the death.” And now, witnessing the change, how he was no less eager to promote the christian faith, than he had been to destroy it; they might be led, he thought, to inquire more seriously and sincerely, and so yield to the evidence by which he himself had been converted.

It was a like argument to that which the rich man in our Lord’s parable is represented as using, in behalf of his five brethren.³ These “had Moses and the prophets:” Moses and the prophets testified to them in vain: “but if one went unto them from the dead, they would repent.” Nay. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” And so it was foreseen of those Jews who believed not: they would not *receive Paul’s testimony concerning Christ*, though he were as one risen from the dead: though instead of “a blasphemer, and a persecutor,” he was now a witness of the faith. And that which had been so many years before foreseen, was now confirmed by experiment of the fact. He who had *consented to the death of the martyr Stephen, and kept the raiment*

² Rom. xviii. 2.

³ See Luke xvi. 28—31.

of them who slew him, was now himself in Stephen's place, a martyr to the same cause. And did they receive his testimony? No sooner had he declared the will of God, that the Gentiles should have the gospel preached unto them, than they broke out in madness and fury: Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live.

The state of the Gentiles, so different from their own, would have excited pity and compassion in hearts rightly constituted. Here are men, they would argue, of like nature with ourselves, who know not God. They have no favour from Him, and He has no glory from them. O that it might please God to bring them to himself, that He might be glorified by their obedience, and they blessed by the light of his countenance. Such would be the reflection and the prayer of men led by the Spirit of God. But with these, their peculiar privileges had only engendered pride, and bigotry, and prejudice, and enmity: Paul mentions it elsewhere as the worst feature in the character of his countrymen, that they “forbade him to speak unto the Gentiles, that they might be saved.”⁴ So violently did this passion urge them, that even the presence of the chief captain and his band did not restrain their fury.

23. *And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,*

24. *The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by*

⁴ 1 Thess. ii. 18.

scourging ; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

25. *And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned ?*

26. *When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest : for this man is a Roman.⁵*

27. *Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman ? He said, Yea.*

28. *And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free-born.⁶*

29. *Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him : and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.*

30. *On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them*

An example is here seen of the wisdom of that mode in which the Scriptures have been delivered to us. If they contained *precept* alone, precept could never extend to all cases and circumstances. But *history*, too, is written for our instruction :

⁵ The chief captain, not understanding Paul's discourse, which was in the Hebrew tongue, and seeing the violence of the people against him, concluded that he must be some heinous malefactor, and resolved to force him to confession.

⁶ In some way which does not appear, Paul had by his birth the privileges of a Roman citizen : whether belonging to him as a native of Tarsus, or descending to him in right of his parents.

and then we see the precepts reduced to practice, then we behold religion in actual exercise.

Our Lord had said, “ Resist not evil ; but who-soever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”⁷ Taken in its literal meaning, this might seem to forbid Paul from remonstrating against the injustice prepared against him, when he was to be *examined by scourging* : that is, when torture was to be used for the purpose of bringing him to confession. Paul, though ready to suffer, if need were, appealed to the law for protection against illegal injury. He appealed to the law, which forbade the applying a scourge to a Roman citizen. And on the same principle we find him in the next chapter expostulating with the high priest, who had ordered that he should be smitten :⁸ “ Sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law ? ”

This example shows us, that they who desire to live as “ a peculiar people,” regulating their conduct, not according to the world, but by the rule of the gospel, are still at liberty to avert injuries by all legal means. The precept of our Lord, though differently expressed, has the same meaning, and prescribes the same rule of practice as that left by the apostle himself, (Rom. xii. 19,) “ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath : for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.”

⁷ Matt. v. 39.

⁸ xxiii. 3.

LECTURE LXXX.

PAUL APPEARS BEFORE THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM.—A. D. 60.

ACTS xxiii. 1—11.

1. *And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.*

2. *And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.*

3. *Then Paul said unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?*

4. *And they that stood by, said, Revilest thou God's high priest?*

5. *Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.¹*

Thus incidentally, Paul proves his own assertion. He had *lived in all good conscience before God*. He “exercised himself to keep always a conscience void of offence both towards God, and

¹ Exodus xxii. 28. “Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor speak evil of the rulers of thy people.” If the high priest on this occasion was without his proper dress, Paul would be unable to distinguish him. He had not been long enough in Jerusalem to be acquainted with his person.

towards all men.” No sooner was it suggested to him, that the words he had uttered were a transgression of the law, than he retracts, and acknowledges that he had spoken ignorantly and unadvisedly. Yet he might have defended himself. For well had the high priest explained the Lord’s comparison, who had likened such characters as his to “whited sepulchres :”² making a fair outward show, but inwardly disgusting and impure. Like the false prophets, who in the same manner had smitten Micaiah and Jeremiah,³ he had attempted to silence Paul, not by truth and reason, but by violence and cruelty.

And now Paul, according to the wisdom given him, saw that it was useless to proceed before the council on the ground which he had first taken. It was vain to show those, who refused to hear, how both in his former sentiments and his present conduct he had maintained *all good conscience before God*. He had at first been zealous for God, though, like themselves now, “not according to knowledge.”⁴ That zeal had led him to persecute the very church which he was now accused of upholding. Nothing but a divine command, such as they also ought to obey, had brought him to “this ministry and apostleship.” All this he would have set before them ; but there were no ears to hear. He must choose another course. And looking at the character of those assembled, he saw that there was one portion of them to whom it would not be unacceptable to declare the resurrection of the dead.

² Matt. xxii. 27.

³ 1 Kings xxii. 24 ; Jerem. xx. 2.

⁴ Rom. x. 2.

And the resurrection of the dead was the cornerstone of the Christian faith. “ For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised : and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain : ye are yet in your sins.” ⁵

This afforded another opening, by which he might attempt to secure their attention.

6. *But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee : of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.*

7. *And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees : and the multitude was divided.*

8. *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit ; but the Pharisees confess both.*

9. *And there arose a great cry : and the scribes that were of the Pharisees part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man : but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.*

10. *And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.*

11. *And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul : for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

“ The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous.”
When he sees any especial encouragement needful

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 16.

for them, his “ministering spirits” are ready, and it is conveyed. Paul had long been anxious to visit the Christians in distant countries, as Spain and Italy.⁶ He had entreated the Roman brethren to “strive together in their prayers unto God” that he might escape the dangers which he foresaw awaiting him in Jerusalem: might “be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea, and come unto them with joy.”⁷ But surrounded as he now was by enemies, there seemed little prospect of his fulfilling this work, or indeed of his doing God more service in the world at all. He might well imagine that “the time of his departure was at hand.” But it was not so. Neither is he allowed to apprehend this. *The Lord stood by him* in a vision of the night, *and said, Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou also bear witness at Rome.* Be of good cheer. Not because his trials were over, his remaining days to be days of ease, or his reward at once bestowed on him. But because the Lord had still need of him. There were still more “things which he must suffer for the Lord’s sake.” He had gone “bound in the spirit to Jerusalem:” knowing that such was his Master’s will, though there most especially he might expect that bonds and afflictions awaited him. So it had proved. But he had borne witness there. And now he *must bear witness also at Rome.* But none of these things moved him, turned him from his purpose, or

⁶ Rom. i. 11; xv. 22—24.

⁷ Rom. xv. 31.

abated his resolution. Nor could they, while the Lord stood by him, and strengthened him, and bid him *be of good cheer*.

The history of God's faithful servants shows that the same gracious eye still watches over them, observes and supplies their need. The Lord does not stand by them in a vision which may be seen. But his Spirit is with them : applies his promises to their heart : gives them a cheerful sense of his favour : " bears witness with their spirit that they are his children." No one can doubt that they have an inward supply of strength proceeding from above, resulting from their faith : sent by Him who is " the Author and Finisher of their faith." Through this grace dangers are encountered ; sacrifices of ease, of interest, of natural wishes are borne ; sufferings are endured ; sorrow is undergone ; and they are still *of good cheer* : there is a sense that God is all-sufficient, and of very faithfulness has caused them to be troubled.

LECTURE LXXXI.

A CONSPIRACY AGAINST PAUL'S LIFE IS DEFEATED.—A. D. 60.

ACTS xxiii. 12—35.

12. *And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.*

13. *And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.*

14. *And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.*

15. *Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.*

Thus a numerous body of men, with the law of God before their eyes, and professing to be very zealous for that law, engage in a conspiracy to break the first principles of the law. No sense of sin or shame affects them. They make no concealment: they acquaint the chief priests and elders with their design: and these, whose business it was to teach righteousness, encourage them, and take part in their scheme. They were in that state of mind which Christ had himself foretold: they

thought that in killing Paul “they were doing God service.”¹ Paul had experienced it in his own case, when he “verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”² And many have been the instances of a like kind in the history of the church. The greatest crimes have been contrived and perpetrated in the name of religion. Men have *bound themselves under a curse*, in God’s name, to do that which is most hateful in the sight of God.

It is a useful lesson. It teaches us to distrust ourselves : to remember, that “the heart is deceitful above all things :” and that there is an adversary ever ready to take advantage of its corruption. Conscience is the guide ; if Satan can pervert the guide, everything is in his power. It is the light ; and “if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness !” Such was the case here. The principle which these persons had taken up, and which the chief priests and elders encouraged, was that by all means and by any means the law of Moses was to be maintained, and the doctrine which they considered adverse to it put down. Therefore the commandment was superseded, which said, “Thou shalt not kill.” Murder was not murder, if it was committed against the enemy of their religion. And their heart did not reprove, or their conscience restrain them.

Must we therefore disregard conscience ? Hold it to be a mere name, and nothing worth ? By no means. Paul “rejoiced in the testimony of his

¹ John xvi. 2. ² Acts xxvi. 9.

conscience.”³ “The spirit of a man that is in him,” is that by which he must judge and examine himself, that he “may have confidence before God;”⁴ that he may know his state in God’s sight. But conscience has shared in the corruption which defaces the whole nature of man, and must be enlightened before it can be trusted, must be watched that it do not fatally deceive. The spirit must be tried, and examined according to the written word. Like our clocks or watches : whilst we take them to the sun, the true standard of time, they are useful to us, and we are commonly guided by them : but unless we thus compare and regulate them, they would mislead, and we could not safely follow them. So we must bring our heart and conscience to the word of God, and regulate it there. This the Jews did not. As a people, generally, they neglected this. It was their sin that they “made the commandment of God of none effect by their traditions.”⁵ Their traditions, their false glosses and interpretations, satisfied their hearts, and governed their consciences. And the conspirators here fell into the same snare. Had they consulted the law of God, they would have found nothing there to justify their murderous plot, everything to condemn and forbid it. But they neglected that law, and “God gave them over to a reprobate mind.” As the prophet had written, “A deceived heart has turned them aside :” they

³ 2 Cor. i. 12.

1 John iii. 21.

⁵ Matt. xv. 6.

confound right with wrong : they “ cannot say, Is there not a lie in my right hand ? ”⁶

16. *And when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.*

17. *Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain : for he hath a certain thing to tell him.*

18. *So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.*

19. *Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me ?*

20. *And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly.*

21. *But do not thou yield unto them : for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him : and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.*

22. *So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.*

23. *And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night ;*

24. *And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.*

25. *And he wrote a letter after this manner :*

⁶ Is. xliv. 20.

26. *Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.*

27. *This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them : then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.*

28. *And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council :*

29. *Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.*

30. *And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.*

31. *Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.*

32. *On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle :*

33. *Who, when they came to Cesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.*

34. *And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia :*

35. *I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.*

It is instructive to trace the various interests which united to preserve Paul from the snare contrived to take away his life. His sister's son was led by the feelings of relationship to reveal the plot to the chief captain, Lysias. The chief captain was concerned, that no violence should take place under his government. The soldiers to whom he committed Paul performed their proper duty, in guard-

ing the prisoner entrusted to their charge. Thus all these unconsciously contributed their various parts, to do that which the “hand and counsel of God determined before to be done.”⁷ They brought Paul in safety to Cesarea, as the first step towards Rome : the first step towards fulfilling the assurance which the Lord had given, that he should there bear witness to his name. The words of the psalmist are verified : “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee ; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”

LECTURE LXXXII.

PAUL DEFENDS HIMSELF BEFORE FELIX AT CESAREA.—A. D. 60.

ACTS xxvi. 1—16.

1. *And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.*

2. *And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,¹*

⁷ Acts iv. 28.

¹ Tertullus, after the manner of a flattering orator, alludes to services rendered to the country by Felix in the destruction of a body of freebooters, of which one Eleazar was chief. But

3. *We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.*

4. *Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.*

5. *For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes :*

6. *Who also hath gone about to profane the temple : whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.*

7. *But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,*

8. *Commanding his accusers to come unto thee : by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.*

9. *And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.*

10. *Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself :*

11. *Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.*

12. *And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city :*

13. *Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.*

14. *But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets :*

Felix, as a governor, had no general claim to praise ; much otherwise.

15. *And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*

Thus Paul clears himself from the various accusations of Tertullus. Only seven days had passed after his arrival at Jerusalem, when they assailed him in the temple; having found him there, stirring up no tumult, not even *disputing with any man*, but engaged in the ceremonies of their own law. Still he confessed his *heresy*: if heresy it was, to *worship the God of his fathers*, the God whom they boasted in, through him whom *the law and the prophets* had foretold. Further, they *allowed the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*. He proclaimed this, through him who had actually risen, “and become the first fruits of them that slept.” They could not, then, accuse his doctrines. And would they condemn his manner of life? He describes it:—

16. *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward man.*

We are not all summoned, as Paul was, in this world, to give account of our lives. But we shall be summoned to this hereafter. We have the same *hope toward God* which he had, *that there shall be a resurrection of the dead*. Inquire, then, what influence this hope had upon him; what course of conduct it led him to pursue?

He laboured to *have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward man*.

A conscience *void of offence*! Is this possible? If the law demands, that we love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength; and that we love our neighbour as ourselves;—is there any one thus perfect? Certainly there is no man. By this strict law shall no man living be justified. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

But Paul had laid the foundation of his hope not in the law, but in the gospel. He “desired to be found not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith.”² That was “all his salvation, and all his desire.” The manner of life which he professes, was the conduct arising out of his faith: the object at which he aimed; and to attain which, he *exercised himself*.

And not in vain. Not without success. The design of the gospel is to produce such a course of life. There is provision for it; provision, that wilful sin, wilful *offence toward God or man*, should not be committed by the Christian, who is enabled to “resist the devil,” to “overcome the world,” to “mortify the deeds of the body.” And there is also provision that sins of infirmity and frailty should be restrained and gradually subdued, by “the inward renewing of the spirit day by day.”

No doubt, there is still natural corruption and habitual weakness: constant danger, lest the remainder of corrupt nature should prevail, and the heart fall back into the sins to which it is of itself inclined, instead of growing in grace and holiness.

² See Phil. iii. 7—12.

If the besetting frailty become the reigning habit, the conscience is no longer *void of offence*, the spiritual state is dangerous. There may be weeds in a field of corn, and yet the crop may be precious; but if the weeds predominate and overspread the corn, the field is worthless, and abandoned by the husbandman. In nature, this is prevented by careful cultivation; by watchfulness and labour. So it must be in the field of grace. The apostle watched and laboured. *Herein*, he says, *do I exercise myself*. I do not expect to keep a conscience void of offence without the proper means. And we know something of the nature of his *exercise*. He tells us, that he “kept under his body, and brought it into subjection.”³ He tells us that he “would not be brought under the power” of even lawful things;⁴ would not suffer them to become necessary to him, lest indulgence should lead to licentiousness. He tells us, that like one engaged in a race, he constantly looked onward, and “pressed toward the mark, not as though he had already attained, either were already perfect.”⁵ Such was his idea, and such was his example, of a life led in “the faith of the Son of God.”

Here, then, in what dropped from St. Paul under the accusation of his enemies, we see the duty and aim of every Christian. He must *exercise himself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man*. And this he will do, by watchfulness, by self-inquiry. What remains of

1 Cor. ix. 27.

* See 1 Cor. vi. 12.

⁵ Phil. iii. 12.

corruption linger in his heart ? What love of things forbidden ? What evil temper and disposition lurks ready to break forth whenever opportunity and temptation arise ? To the end, there will be need of the same endeavours, the same praying, watching, meditating, and every other means, to keep the heart clean from its iniquity, as there was at first to make it so. The duty will be easier, the success more manifest, more complete ; but the means must never be remitted whilst we continue in the flesh, and possess a nature which “ lusts against the Spirit.”

Is the caution urgent ? So is the risk. Is the labour great ? So also is the prize. There is no other evidence to which we can appeal of an interest in Christ's atonement, than that we answer the purpose for which that atonement was made. “ He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works ;”⁶ keeping a *conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man*.

⁶ Tit. ii. 12—14.

LECTURE LXXXIII.

CONTINUATION OF PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE
FELIX.—A. D. 60.

ACTS xxiv. 17—27.

17. *Now after many years, I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.*

18. *Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.¹*

19. *Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had aught against me.*

20. *Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,*

21. *Except it be for this one voice, that I cried, standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.*

A few days before, when Paul was defending himself at Jerusalem, an interruption took place at this point, in consequence of the dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul had then alleged, that this was the ground of accusation. *Touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.* His doctrine all turned on this. He preached “through Jesus the resurrection of the dead.” He maintained the resurrec-

¹ xxi. 27—30.

tion of Jesus, as the precursor of all that are in the graves : who shall come forth, and stand before the judgment-seat of God, “ to give account of the things done in the body.”

By this time Felix perceived the nature of Paul’s crime. It did not press immediately. No danger need be apprehended to the state.

22. *And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way,² he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.*

23. *And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister, or to come unto him.*

24. *And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.*

25. *And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.³*

26. *He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him : wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.*

27. *But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room : and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*

Thus the governor sends for his prisoner, and inquires concerning the faith which he taught, and

² Either through what he had heard from Paul, or from previous acquaintance with the christian doctrine, during the six or seven years of his government.

³ Ἐμφοβος γενομενος, becoming alarmed.

for teaching which he was so vehemently accused.

Paul did not use this opportunity to obtain favour, or gain his liberty. Whether speaking before christian disciples, or before kings and rulers, he must still speak as before “ God, who trieth the hearts, and not as pleasing men.” For what should it profit him, if by flattering words he should procure a few years of ease, and then be summoned to account for his unfaithfulness? He thought, not of himself, but of the cause entrusted to him, and of the state of the unhappy man whom he was addressing. For Felix was one “ dead in trespasses and sins :” living below the light he had, even as a heathen. He was unjust and cruel in his government. He was *unrighteous*. One reason why he *kept Paul bound*, was because he hoped that *money should be given* for his release. *Temperance*, too, was unknown to him. He had no command over his passions. Drusilla, who accompanied him as his wife, had been enticed from her own husband by him. Paul, therefore, began at the foundation : showed that these are the sins which separate man from God : signs of a heart alienated from him, and requiring to be renewed and purified.

Governor, (he might have said,) thou art the creature of God. And the Creator has a claim to the allegiance of his creatures. One of his commands is, that we be righteous in our dealings towards each other. Do no violence. Pervert

not judgment. Oppress not the fatherless and widow, and those that have none to help them. In a word, “whatsoever thou wouldest that men should do unto thee, do also unto them.” What does thy conscience say in this matter? Canst thou meet God when he comes to judgment, as having done justice and loved mercy?

Thus he might reason with him of *righteousness*.

Governor, (he may have said,) God is a God of holiness. He cannot look upon iniquity. Sin is “the abominable thing which he hateth.”⁴ And therefore all who are at peace with him must be temperate in all things: must be holy, for he is holy: must purify themselves, even as he is pure. And here let me ask: What answer does thy conscience make?

Thus would he reason with him of *temperance*.

If thou pleadest former ignorance; there is no ignorance to be pleaded now: for God “hath revealed his wrath from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men:” he hath revealed a day “in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” Now, then, governor, is the time: “Prepare to meet thy God.”

Thus, we may believe, would the apostle reason with Felix of *righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come*. Just as a physician, when

⁴ Jer. xxiv. 4.

anxious to persuade his patient to consent to some change, to submit to some sacrifice on which his life depends, first points out the danger, before he proposes the remedy. Felix must perceive himself to be lying under the wrath of God, before he can repent, and be converted. Like the jailor at Philippi, he must be alarmed for his own safety, before he inquires, "What must I do to be saved?"

O how would Paul's heart have rejoiced, if such had been the effect of his reasoning with Felix? Far more than the promise of liberty, far more than the assurance of life, would it have been sweet to him, if he could have heard that governor confess his guilt, and say, "I have sinned against the Lord." "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." How may I be one of those, to whom "the Lord will not impute sin?"

Full gladly would the answer have been returned, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him." For he "has found a ransom." Unrepented, unforsaken sin, cannot be forgiven. But sin repented of and forsaken has been laid on "One that is mighty to save:" on him who "is the propitiation for our sins:" who has borne their penalty: and the message which I bear, the commission with which I am charged is this: "That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

These blessed tidings Felix was never to hear.

He would not stay to hear; but stopped the discourse, and said, *Go thy way for this time, and when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee.*

Such was Felix. The discourse with the apostle had this result and no other. It left him under a deeper responsibility. "The kingdom of God had come nigh him." He rejected it, and preferred to remain the slave of Satan. He resisted the first impressions of conscience, and conscience troubled him no more, but left him to bear the accumulated weight of guilt which the day of judgment will disclose.

Alas! it is a too common case. He heard the word of God condemning sin: but he hardened his heart against the word, and continued to treasure up unto himself "wrath against the day of wrath."

And what is this, but the case of every one who lives in the habitual commission of what God has forbidden? He cannot so live, without feeling from time to time the compunction which in this land of light and knowledge must touch every wilful transgressor. The thought must sometime occur, "What shall I do in the end?" But instead of yielding to this conviction, he forbids it entrance. He shuts it out by business. He stifles it in dissipation: in thoughtless company. Conscience, tired of warning in vain, will warn no more: till at last, perhaps, she rises up with force which can no longer be resisted, and the dying bed bears wit-

ness to the vain lamentations of conviction without conversion. “O that thou hadst known, in that thy day, the things belonging to thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.”

LECTURE LXXXIV.

PAUL IS ACCUSED BEFORE FESTUS.—A. D. 62.

ACTS xxv. 1—12.

1. *Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem.*

2. *Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,*

3. *And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.*

4. *But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.*

5. *Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.*

Such was the continued malice of the Jews. Two years might have brought them to a better mind. Not, however, unless it brought the grace of God into their hearts. Without this, time has no other effect than to fix more firmly the prevailing passion.

So it proved in this case. A new governor is appointed in Felix' room. But the last favour which that governor could show to the Jews, was to "leave Paul bound:" and the first favour which the Jews ask of their new ruler is, that Paul might be conveyed back to Jerusalem, that they might *lie in wait in the way to kill him*. The care of God to preserve is more watchful than the wrath of Satan to destroy. As he had before directed the hearts of Lysias and of Felix, so he also directs the heart of Festus. Festus is evidently aware of the motive of the Jews, and disappoints it. *Go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.*

6. *And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down into Cæsarea; and the next day sitting in the judgment-seat, commanded Paul to be brought.*

7. *And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove;*

8. *While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended anything at all.*

9. *But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?*

10. *Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.*

11. *For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none*

*of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar.*¹

12. *Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.*

Thus Paul still remains in prison. Two years he had been detained there under the government of Felix. And now he must wait till Festus has the mind, or the opportunity, to transfer him for judgment to the emperor at Rome. He whom we have so long followed through his many journeyings and labours—he whom we have seen escaping from one persecution only that he might encounter another, never at ease but when employed about his Master's business,—he is now shut up in prison, and as far as appears, had no opportunity to “speak at all, or teach in the name of Jesus.” So various are the ways in which God tries his servants. Paul had to comfort him both the example and the resignation of those in former times. “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.” “It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.”²

Heavenly wisdom might see a need for this discipline. Every man, whilst he has an outward duty to fulfil in his particular station, has also a business to carry on within—in the government of

¹ Paul was a freeman of Rome, *i. e.* had the privileges of a Roman citizen. One of these was a right of *appealing* to the emperor at Rome against the decision of the magistrates of a province.

² Ps. xxxix. 9. 1 Sam. iii. 18.

his own heart. This is often ill pursued in the hurry of a life like that of Paul—a life of restless activity. Daily contending as he was in the synagogues, and public places, and with them that met with him: rebuking the prejudices of the Jews, and instructing the ignorance of the Gentiles: teaching “both publicly, and from house to house:” night and day warning men to flee from the wrath to come:—he had little leisure for entering into himself, or watching the movements of his heart. There might need an interval when he might “be still, and commune” with his own bosom. And if such an interval were needful, then we may be sure that the circumstances of Paul’s life would be so ordered that the opportunity should be afforded him.

Vain, however, is the attempt to trace the design of all those mysterious dealings, through which the people of God are led to their final habitation. It would often be presumptuous to inquire. We may be content to know, that “he doeth all things well.” “The branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bear more fruit.”³ All things, whether favourable to our wishes, or contrary to them; whether conducive or not to our present ease; all things, whether liberty or freedom, notoriety or seclusion, health or sickness, life or death, work together for the benefit of those who love God, and whom God loves. They cannot withdraw the Christian from the love of him to whom he has committed himself. Still less can

³ John xv. 2.

they withdraw God's love from the Christian, whom the Spirit is inwardly supporting and comforting: and who "is kept by the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein," (as St. Peter writes, and he was no stranger to such circumstances,⁴) "wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ; whom having not seen, ye love; and in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

LECTURE LXXXV.

FESTUS REPORTS THE CASE OF PAUL TO
AGRIPPA.—A. D. 62.

ACTS xxv. 13—27.

13. *And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came into Cæsarea to salute Festus.*¹

⁴ 1 Pet. i. 5—8.

¹ This Agrippa was son of Herod Agrippa, of whose charac-

14. *And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix :*

15. *About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.*

16. *To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.*

17. *Therefore, when they were come hither without any delay, on the morrow I sat on the judgment-seat, and I commanded the man to be brought forth.*

18. *Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed :*

19. *But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*

20. *And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.*

21. *But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cæsar.*

Festus, we see, expresses his surprise at the sort of charge brought against the apostle. A man against whom so violent a feeling of enmity existed, must have done, he imagined, something “worthy of death or of bonds.” But he finds, on inquiry, that *they brought none accusation of such things as*

ter and death an account is given in chap. 12. He was king or governor of Chalcis, and part of Judea. Bernice was his sister ; as also was Drusilla, wife of Felix.

he supposed, but had certain questions against him of their own superstition.

It was the same with another Roman, the celebrated Pliny. In the exercise of his government, about forty years afterwards, he thought it his duty to investigate the character of the Christians and their assemblies. They “were everywhere spoken against:” to belong to them was a capital crime: and yet their number was daily increasing. He writes word to the emperor Trajan, that he had tried to discover the nature of this sect. And he, too, found no testimony *of such things as he supposed*. All he could learn was, that the Christians were accustomed on a stated day to meet before daylight, and to repeat among themselves a hymn to Christ as a God, and to bind themselves by an oath not to commit wickedness, but, on the contrary, to abstain from thefts, robberies, and adulteries: not to violate their promise or deny their pledge.²

Pliny, however, and his predecessor, Festus, whilst each agreed in the innocence of the Christians, agreed also in their opinion of them. It was “a depraved and excessive superstition” which they followed. So Pliny determined: and Festus speaks in the same slighting and insulting manner. He found *laid against Paul certain questions of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive*. With these heathens, religion was, publicly, a matter of state government: privately, a matter of indifference.

² See Milner, vol. i. cent. ii. ch. i.

Every nation had its own *superstition*. Nor is this confined to the character of Festus, or the age of Pliny. Very much the same is the opinion of all countries and all ages, among those who are too busy, or too careless, or too vicious to inquire. As if it were a trifling question, whether God had revealed himself to his creatures : as if it were a subject of no importance, whether He, “ who in times past spake unto the fathers by the prophets, had in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.”³

The account of Festus stirred up the curiosity of his guest Agrippa, who was less a stranger to “ all customs and questions which are among the Jews.”

22. *Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.*⁴

23. *And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.*

24. *And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.*

25. *But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.*

³ Heb. i. 1, 2.

⁴ In a way of public examination, for the purpose stated in ver. 26. It was not a judicial trial.

26. *Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord: wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.*

27. *For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.*

Thus Festus opens the case, and, as it were, introduces Paul to the assembly. He was fulfilling the prophecy of his Lord, and for his sake was “brought before kings and governors.” They came *with great pomp*: and were little aware how much greater than themselves he really was who was arraigned as a prisoner before them. They held authority under a powerful king: they were Cæsar’s deputies, and Cæsar was then the highest of earthly rulers. But Paul, though “an ambassador in bonds,” was ambassador of “the King of kings and Lord of lords.” In present appearance we know how strong the contrast must have been, between the splendour of Agrippa and Bernice, and their train of lofty state, and the simplicity of “Paul, the prisoner of the Lord.” But we equally know which would seem greatest, wisest, happiest, in the sight of God: to whom “a thousand years are as one day:” and who, therefore, together with the day of anxiety and humiliation which Paul was at that moment passing, sees also “the thousand years:” the years which no man can number: the eternity of happiness which was awaiting him, at the close of this short day.

“ We walk by faith, and not by sight.” The people of God are enabled to realise these hopes, and so enjoy a support proportioned to their trials. Paul says, concerning himself, writing, probably, from his prison at Cæsarea—“ We are persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed.” “ For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” “ For which cause we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” ⁵

LECTURE LXXXVI.

PAUL ANSWERS FOR HIMSELF BEFORE AGRIPPA.

A. D. 62.

ACTS xxvi. 1—8.

1. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself :*

2. *I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews :*

3. *Especially because I know thee to be expert in all*

⁵ See 2 Cor. iv. 9—16 ; Rom. viii. 18.

*customs and questions which are among the Jews : wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.*¹

4. *My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews ;*

5. *Which knew me from the beginning (if they would testify) that after the most straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.*

6. *And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers :*

7. *Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.*

Condemned as he was by the Jews for teaching things contrary to their religion, the object of Paul in his defence must be, to show, that instead of making void their national faith, he was in fact establishing it. There was no reason, he first urges, why he should contradict the law and the prophets : brought up, as he had been, *among his own nation*, having lived, not only as a Jew, but a Jew of the strictest sort—*a Pharisee*. Nor did he oppose the law. For that faith, on account of which he *now stood and was judged*, was but the fulfilment of the *promise made of God unto their fathers* : that which *their twelve tribes* were anxiously expecting. He was now accused, because he affirmed that this very hope had been fulfilled : that the long promised, long expected Saviour had been sent, and was proved to be the Saviour by his resurrection from the grave. So he had before

¹ Agrippa being himself of Jewish parentage, was not, like Festus or Felix, ignorant of the Jewish history and law.

reasoned with the Jews at Antioch. (xiii. 32.)
 “ We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God has fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he has raised up Jesus from the dead.” And then he earnestly asks, why should they be so unwilling to credit this fact ?

8. *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead ?*

In putting this question to the assembly, Paul does not speak so much of the resurrection of Jesus, as of the resurrection of the dead in general.² This would imply that unbelief on this point lay at the root of much of their resistance to the gospel: and that the assembly before which he spoke, was not unlikely to be tainted with the leaven of the Sadducees.

And yet among the Jewish nation, it never ought to have been thought *incredible that God should raise the dead*. It was denied, or doubted, by the heathens, who had no knowledge of the creation of the world, no distinct view of the power or wisdom of the Creator. Not so the Jew. He was taught in his scriptures, that the body which returned to the dust, had been dust before, till God gave to the dust of the earth the form and fashion of man. He knew that though the body had ceased to breathe, it might be made to breathe again: just as in the beginning, God breathed

² He does not write *τον νεκρον*, one dead, or him who had been dead: but *τους νεκρους*, the dead.

into man's nostrils the breath of life. Is it more, to bring life back to that which has once been, than to give life once to that which has never been? The Jewish scriptures taught, how God had said, "Let there be light, and there was light." Cannot he say, Let there be life and motion in the body which has ceased to live and move? He who said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear;"³ cannot he say, Let the sea give back the dead that are in it,⁴ and let all that are in the graves come forth, and stand before the Son of man?

It is idle, therefore, for those who believe in the creation, to deny the resurrection; and to say within themselves, "How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" God giveth them a body as it pleaseth him. He who gave the corruptible body, will also give the incorruptible. He who gave the vile and earthly, will also give the glorious and heavenly.⁵

Another argument ought to have satisfactorily convinced every believer in the Jewish scriptures, that God would *raise the dead*. What else could agree with the sentiment of their ancestor Abraham, a sentiment approved of God, and confirmed by our reason and understanding: "That the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do

³ Gen. i. 9.

⁴ Rev. xx. 13.

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 42, &c

right?"⁶ Should it be the same with Abel as with Cain? with David as with Jeroboam? with Naboth as with Ahab? with Josiah as with Jehoiakim? Surely, when they looked back upon the case of any one of their holy men, who "served God in their generation," and then fell asleep; they saw a proof of the resurrection; they saw what made it incredible, not that God *should*, but that God *should not*, raise the dead.

Supposing, for instance, they had turned their minds towards some one of these: upon Moses. They were acquainted with his history. They knew that he was brought up in the palace of the king of Egypt, and that all the honours of the land, all the pleasures of the court, were within his reach. At the age when these are most alluring, he renounced them all, that he might fulfil the counsel of God in delivering his people. He gave up what naturally he would have desired, he followed what naturally he would have disliked, because it was God's will. He overcame his own peculiar disposition, for he was the "meekest man of all the earth," and set himself to oppose the power, and the haughtiness, and the obstinacy of Pharaoh. For forty years he suffered the perverseness and withstood the wickedness of the people entrusted to his charge.

At last the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, "Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, and die in the mount whither thou goest up: and be gathered unto thy people."⁷

⁶ See Gen. xviii. 25, &c.

⁷ Deut. xxxii. 49, 50.

Get thee up into mount Abarim, and die. Could they suppose this to mean, Go, and be extinct for ever? Thou hast served me these fourscore years: and now it is the same as if thou hadst transgressed against me fourscore years. Go, and be extinct for ever.

This is the thing which it would be really difficult to believe and comprehend. It is not incredible that God should raise the dead: that he who made the body should revive the body: but it is incredible, that there should be no difference between the man that serveth him, and the man that serveth him not.⁸

Arguments like these ought to have been convincing to every reader of the Jewish scriptures, even if positive testimony had not been abundantly found there. *We* have no need of such arguments. “Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.” It is revealed to us in plain terms, that “all shall stand before the judgment-seat of God, to give account of the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad.” The word of God declares that it shall be so. And the fact of the resurrection of Christ has shown that it may be so. By that fact assurance is given to all, that God will raise the dead.

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”⁹

⁸ See Mal. iii. 18.

⁹ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

LECTURE LXXXVII.

THE DISCOURSE BEFORE AGRIPPA CONTINUED.

A. D. 62.

ACTS xxvi. 9—18.

9. *I verily thought within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*

10. *Which thing I also did in Jerusalem : and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests ; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.*

11. *And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*

Paul here before Agrippa follows the same line of argument which he had addressed to the Jewish assembly in the temple : showing that he had not lightly taken up the opinion which he maintained. They thought his doctrine incredible. He himself had once thought the same. No one could be more opposed to the gospel, and to those who believed it, than he had formerly been. He had denied that Jesus was the Messiah : he had forced others to deny it, persecuting them to the uttermost. Why, then, was he now preaching the faith which once he destroyed ? Nothing had

convinced him, but a proof which it was impossible to withstand.

12. *Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,*

13. *At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.*

14. *And when we were all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

15. *And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*

16. *But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I shall appear unto thee;*

17. *Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,*

18. *To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

The commission given to Paul is more fully expressed here than in any other passage. He was chosen to be a witness or messenger from God to the people, and to the Gentiles more especially. And as such, he was to *open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.*

To open their eyes. The Gentiles were idolaters. There were different forms of their idolatry; but they all worshipped something instead of the

true God : some created thing, and not the Creator. And what can more truly describe the state of an idolater, than the idea of blindness, darkness ! The apostles might go from city to city, and from country to country, and justly say, It is all darkness. There was no want of light in things belonging to this world : as to such knowledge, the understanding was bright and clear : but all was darkness in what related to God, and concerned the soul. Isaiah points this out with the pen of an enlightened witness, (xliv. 9, &c.) “ They that make a graven image are all of them vanity. They see not, nor know, that they may be ashamed. The smith with the tongs and the hammer, the carpenter with his rule and plane, fashion the idol after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars ; he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn : for he will take thereof and warm himself : yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it ; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire ; with part thereof he eateth flesh ; and the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image : he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me, for thou art my god. They have not known, nor understood : for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see, and their hearts, that they cannot understand.”

We are elsewhere told, why their eyes had been

thus shut, and their hearts closed : “ As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.” ¹

Now, however, mercy was intended. The veil should be taken away. God would send his minister *to open their eyes*, that they might “ show themselves men,” and “ be ashamed ” of their former blindness. Satan had long kept them under his power : now they should turn unto God, and partake of the provision which he had made for their *receiving forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus*.

Forgiveness and sanctification : such is the twofold promise. First, God treats the sinner after the example of the creditor in the parable.² The debtor is brought before him, “ owing ten thousand talents,” and “ having not to pay.” The lord of the servant is moved with compassion, and forgives him the debt. “ I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.” ³ The blood of Christ is spread over the account, and there is reconciliation.

This is the first promise ; the forgiveness of sins. Still greater is the eternal *inheritance among them that are sanctified*. The unprofitable, disobedient servant, is not only forgiven, but received into favour ; adopted as an heir : is “ no more a servant, but a son.” ⁴ The same Spirit who turned his heart to God will now renew and purify that

¹ Rom. i. 28.

² Matt. xviii 24, &c.

³ Isaiah xlv. 22.

⁴ Gal. iv. 7.

heart, and adorn it with heavenly graces, will educate it according to its new destination, and will prepare it for “the inheritance of the saints in light.” Thus Paul reminds the Ephesians of their former and their present state.⁵ “Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.” Ye were darkness, when Christ commissioned me to *open your eyes, and turn you from the power of Satan unto God*. Remember for what purpose ye were enlightened. “Walk as children of light: (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth :) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” “For, for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”⁶

The subject must not be passed over, as if it could not have any relation to ourselves.

It shows us what is the natural state of man ;—darkness as to spiritual things: alienation from God: subjugation to Satan. The idol which is worshipped may not be such as the heathen worshipped to whom Paul was sent. But *some* idol will be worshipped, and God will not be honoured and obeyed. So it will be till the heart is converted from its natural state, and brought to the light of the gospel: brought to “the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.” It is not enough, that “darkness is past, and the

⁵ Eph. v. 8—11.

⁶ 1 John iii. 8.

true light shineth” in our land. It must also “shine within our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”⁷ The same test must be applied to us, as the apostles applied to their converts from heathenism. If we say that we are *turned to God*, and “have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”⁸

LECTURE LXXXVIII.

PAUL CONCLUDES HIS DEFENCE BEFORE
AGRIPPA.—A. D. 62.

ACTS xxvi. 19—32.

19. *Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:*

20. *But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*

21. *For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.*

⁷ 2 Cor. iv. 8.

⁸ 1 John i. 6.

22. *Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come :*

23. *That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.*

24. *And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself ; much learning doth make thee mad.*

Such was the impression on the mind of Festus, to whom all these things were new and strange. As a heathen, he knew nothing of Moses, or the prophets, or of an expected Saviour : and he supposed that Paul was a mere visionary, deceived by his imagination, and acting upon a dream as if it had been reality.

And so Festus might have thought, if there had been nothing connected with the dream. If Moses and others of old time had not written, and left “ the sure word of prophecy :” if there had been no evidence, that Christ had come in the flesh : if no account could be given, why he should *suffer* : if no expectation had been held out that he should *rise from the dead*, and no proof could be alleged that he *had risen* :—if none of these things had been connected with the vision ; then he might be reckoned as the dupe of imagination, and his words treated as madness. But Paul confidently appeals to Agrippa as knowing what Festus was ignorant of ; as knowing how prophecy and event, history and doctrine, confirmed each other.

25. *But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus ; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

26. *For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely : for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him ; for this thing was not done in a corner.*

27. *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest.*

28. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

Paul had an advantage with Agrippa, which he had not before when reasoning with Felix. He had now to deal with one who recognised the Scriptures ; acknowledged that God had revealed himself to mankind. *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest.* Agrippa had that general belief in the divine word, which such men commonly have when brought up in a country where it is professedly received, and God is avowedly worshipped. They are by no means prepared to deny the truth of revelation, any more than they are disposed to act as if it were true. Still as Agrippa, when pressed closely by the apostle, could not deny that he believed the prophets ; so in our own land, and in our own day, a belief rests upon the mind of many, though it does not influence the heart. And in time of trouble, of danger, of distress, they are ready to say, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* They commence, perhaps, some plans of reformation ; they abstain from practices which conscience condemns, and enter upon a course of life more consistent with christian faith.

They illustrate that momentary feeling upon Agrippa's mind, when he said, *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

29. *And Paul said, I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

The words of Agrippa excited an affectionate emotion in the heart of Paul, while the thought arose within him—*Almost a Christian!* That profiteth little! O that king Agrippa were indeed a Christian!

To be *almost* a Christian, only increases condemnation. It shows that truth has been neglected or resisted. "This is the condemnation, that light hath come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." Agrippa is himself an example. His state before God was made far worse by what passed at this examination of Paul. Before, probably he knew little of the Christians, except that they were a sect called Nazarenes, and "everywhere spoken against." Now he knew what they believed, and on what their belief was grounded. Now he knew that they rested their faith on the very law and prophets which he himself confessed to be from God. But instead of yielding to conscience, and appointing a time when he might hear Paul again of this important matter; he rises up, and dissolves the assembly. Because on the instant it would cross his mind that to become a Christian would be the destruction of his worldly prospects, and in-

volve the new modelling of his whole life. Therefore the movement of his conscience was but the turn of a thought, the feeling of a moment ; like the spark which blazes up, and on which at the same instant a drop of water falls, and it is extinguished. But it has shown that there is something within, something which we should not have been aware of if the spark had not betrayed it ; something which might have grown up into a continuing and steady flame, if means had been used to foster and not to quench it. When account is given “ of the things done in the body,” account must be given of the perverseness, the sinfulness, the hardness of heart, which checked that rising flame.

This would furnish just cause for Paul’s passionate exclamation, and his prayer that Agrippa might be *altogether* a Christian. *Not only almost, but altogether.* He could be nothing else, if he were a Christian at all in any proper or available sense. There is no mid-way. To be a Christian, is to have sought acceptance with God through Christ, and to be looking for salvation through faith in him. This admits of no middle course. If one is accused before men, there is no middle course ; he must be either innocent or guilty, and must plead either one or the other. So it is at the bar of God. Either we are trusting in ourselves that we are righteous ; or because we are not righteous, we are trusting in Christ, who has made propitiation for our sins. Therefore there can be no mid-way as to FAITH ; no meaning in being *almost a Christian*. Neither as to PRACTICE, can there be a middle

course. Because either we are seeking “first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” or we are seeking this world first: that is, preferring it, wherever the interests of the one clash with the interests of the other. We cannot at the same time love God most, and mammon most. Either we are yielding to some desires, and habits, and temptations contrary to the gospel; or we are rejecting and opposing these, as they must who are *altogether Christians*, and bringing every thought, and word, and deed into obedience to Christ. Such must be their purpose and endeavour. Not because to be altogether a Christian, a man must be altogether perfect. But because he must be altogether sincere in aiming at perfection, and allowing himself in nothing short of it.

This was the state of Paul’s own heart, and knowing the comfort which he derived from the consciousness of this, and the blessed consequence which should follow, he earnestly desired that both Agrippa, and all before whom he was pleading, might be nothing less; might be *not only almost but altogether Christians*.

Agrippa, however, had now heard enough to satisfy his curiosity, and too much, perhaps, to maintain his ease of mind; and he would hear no more.

30. *And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:*

31. *And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.*

32. *Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.*

LECTURE LXXXIX.

PAUL ON HIS VOYAGE TO ROME ADMONISHES
THE OFFICERS OF THEIR DANGER.—A. D. 62.

ACTS xxvii. 1—12.

1. *And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.*

2. *And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia, one Aristarchus, a Macedonian, of Thessalonica, being with us.*

3. *And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.*

He who saw fit that Paul should “bear witness to him at Rome,” provided also mitigations for the distresses of the voyage. Two faithful companions, Luke and Aristarchus, attended him. And as in former days, when the counsels of God required that Joseph should be carried into Egypt, God gave him favour first with Potiphar, and afterwards with

the keeper of the prison ; so now he gave Paul favour in the sight of Julius the centurion. No doubt the character of Paul astonished him ; and he saw that he was no ordinary man, though the principles on which he acted were a mystery to him. Therefore, he *courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself*. For everywhere he had friends, as the apostle of Christ. He could not stop at Sidon, or any other much frequented port, without finding those who had been “ added to the church.” These would gladly welcome their own apostle, Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles—Paul “ the prisoner of the Lord,” the “ ambassador in bonds.” And in such welcome and intercourse he would enjoy a compensation for the hardships he was enduring, and for trials yet to come.

4. *And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.*

5. *And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.*

6. *And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing unto Italy ; and he put us therein.*

7. *And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone ;*

8. *And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called, The Fair Havens ; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.*

9. *Now when much time was spent, and when sailing*

¹ Phil. iv. 19.

*was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,*²

10. *And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt, and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.*

11. *Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.*

12. *And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south-west and north-west.*

The account here given describes human nature generally. Present inclination, present interests, bias the judgment, and lead men to act on the most improbable expectations. All the signs by which these voyagers ought to have been guided, concurred with the opinion declared by Paul, and showed that the voyage must be dangerous and ruinous. But the master and owner of the ship under-rated the danger, and despised the risk. They were anxious to proceed. Their opportunity would be lost : their market missed : their hope of gain disappointed. The centurion also was impatient ; desired to see the end of his voyage, and to deliver up his charge at Rome. So the mariners advised to pursue their course in defiance of warnings ; and the officers acquiesced, and *believed the*

² The great *fast* of expiation, appointed, Lev. xvi. 29, to take place on the tenth day of the month Tisri, or about 25th September, the season of the equinoctial gales.

master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

It is an example of the feelings to which men yield in things concerning the soul ; and the whole history furnishes an useful illustration.

The gospel itself may be compared to a refuge : the sort of refuge which Paul would have persuaded the mariners to secure. But present interests stand in the way ; the refuge is not sought ; the haven is not entered. There are pursuits which, if it were entered, must be given up : there are pleasures which must be resigned : too many in the world imagine that some future time will suffice to secure the interests of the soul : and men believe the things currently spoken in the world, more than the things spoken by the Bible and the ministers of religion. The obstacles are present, the self-denial immediate : and the heart cannot be prevailed on to oppose the obstacles and submit to the self-denial, whilst a hope remains that the storm may be dispersed, and the voyage be prolonged.

Ye should have believed me, said Paul afterwards, and not have incurred this harm and loss. When the danger is no longer distant, then appears the wisdom of those who have fled for refuge whilst yet there was time. When the storm rises—perhaps affliction—perhaps sickness and approaching death—then is the want of a refuge felt, and then is seen the blessedness of having secured the haven.

For that must be first provided. The storm will

not carry the vessel to the shelter which it needs. It must be found anchored there, when the tempest comes. Then they who are within the haven to which their faith has brought them, the haven of God's mercy in Christ, enjoy that "strong consolation" which they desired and sought, when they "fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them."³ Though the clouds gather, and the winds blow, and beat upon the soul, it shall not sink, for it is anchored upon a rock.

LECTURE XC.

THE SHIP IN WHICH PAUL WAS SAILING BEING IN DANGER, PAUL FORETELS THE PRESERVATION OF THE LIVES OF THOSE ON BOARD.—

A. D. 62.

Acts xxvii. 13—26.

13. *And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.*

14. *But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.*

15. *And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.*

16. *And running under a certain island, which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat ;*

³ See Heb. vi. 18.

17. *Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship ; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.*

18. *And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship ;*

19. *And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.*

20. *And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.*

21. *But after long abstinence, Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.*

22. *And now I exhort you to be of good cheer : for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.*

Whilst affairs are prosperous, the opinion or advice of such men as Paul is neglected and despised. In the hour of difficulty, their counsel is more justly valued. When Belshazzar gave a royal feast to a thousand of his lords, and “ the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine was in the feast ;”¹—there was no place for Daniel : his presence would have cast a gloom over the whole assembly. But when the alarm arose, and “ king Belshazzar was greatly troubled, and his lords were astonished ;”—then let Daniel be summoned, for “ an excellent spirit is in him,” and the best hope of safety is there. It is much the same in this voyage. Paul’s advice had been disregarded. But now the mariners had exhausted

¹ Dan. v.

every measure by which they expected to preserve the ship, and were reduced to despair. *All hope that we should be saved was taken away.* Paul alone comes forward to their comfort and encouragement. He reminds them that he had some claim to be credited, for he had forewarned them of *the harm and loss* which they had incurred, and if they had hearkened unto him they would not *have loosed from Crete.* Now, therefore, they might believe him, when he exhorted them to *be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.* And then he declares the reason of his confidence. It had a firm basis to rest on.

23. *For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,*

24. *Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*

They had seen from the first, and Paul does not conceal it, that he was the servant of a God whom his fellow-passengers knew not. And now he openly proclaims this. He had been visited by the messenger of God, *whose I am, and whom I serve.*

Though all do not likewise serve God, all are likewise his. “It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” As Daniel reminded Belshazzar; “the God in whose hands thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, thou hast not glorified.”

To Belshazzar, God manifested himself in judgment. Here was the voice of mercy. *Fear not, Paul*: that which has been determined concerning thee must take place: though all things conspire together to oppose it, thou must stand before the emperor at Rome. *And, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*

Paul, we may be sure, had been earnest in prayer before God in behalf of these people. And now he announces that God had listened to his prayer; had given him assurance that *there should be no loss of any man's life among them*. He exhorts them, therefore, to feel that confidence which those are entitled to feel, who have received God's promises. For the promises of God are not like those of man, sometimes turned aside by change of purpose, and sometimes failing through defect of power.

25. *Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*

26. *Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.*

I believe God. Such is the simple description of the state of Paul's mind. He did not suppose that God had spoken, and would fail to make good what he had spoken. But he believed him. As Noah had done, when God had foreshown that he would cover the earth with a flood, and destroy the world which he had made. Noah believed God, and "prepared an ark to the saving of his house." So, too, Abraham had done, when in his old age a son was promised him, "in whose

seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed." Improbable as this seemed, Abraham believed God, that *it should be even as he had told him*.

This belief in God's word, belief like that of Noah, of Abraham, and of Paul, is the very state of mind which characterises the people of God. These believed God—believed that the thing would come to pass which God had declared, notwithstanding present appearances: notwithstanding the objections which might exist against believing this: notwithstanding the inducements which might exist to believe the contrary. The world is full of such objections and such inducements. But the Christian says, *I believe God*, and neither yield to my own heart, nor listen to the world. This is the faith which makes its way through all hindrances: through rugged paths and smooth: "through evil report and good report:" looking up singly to him, whose favour alone it is worth while to secure, and whom alone it is always possible to please; for of him only can we say, that his will changes not. The Christian's language, therefore, is, *I believe God*, when he tells me, that by the deeds of the law no man shall be justified in his sight. And I believe him, when he declares, that "the righteous shall go into life eternal." *I believe God*, when he declares, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;" and I believe him, when he says, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." *I believe God*, when he says, that "faith is his gift:" and I believe him, when he says, that he "giveth to all men liberally:"

that “ whoever asks shall receive, and he that seeks shall find.” *I believe God*, when he says, that “ in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing ;” and I believe him, when he says, “ My grace is sufficient for thee.”

Whoever studies Paul’s life and character, as developed in his letters, will see these to be the principles on which he rested : and that whether preaching or journeying, whether at ease or under trial, whether in his government of himself, or in his intercourse with others, all he did proceeded on the same simple ground of action, *I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*

LECTURE XCI.

THE VESSEL IN WHICH PAUL SAILED IS WRECKED, AND THE CREW CAST SAFE ON THE SHORE.
—A.D. 62.

ACTS xxvii. 27—44.

27. *But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country ;*

28. *And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms : and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.*

29. *Then fearing lest they should have fallen upon*

rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

30. *And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,*

31. *Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.*

32. *Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.*

Here the character of man appears in all its natural selfishness. The sailors, perceiving that the ship had been driven so near towards the land, that a boat might reach the shore, formed a design of escaping from the ship themselves, and leaving the rest on board, unskilled in navigation, to the mercy of the winds and waves. Paul, by the wisdom given to him, discovered their intention, and prevented it by timely warning. *Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.*

God, indeed, had promised that he should visit Rome, and had also given him the lives of those who sailed with him. But this counsel was to be effected through the means by which, in the usual course, a ship is navigated and preserved. The decree of God was, that these means should be successful in directing the vessel to the shore.

It is an example of his will in all cases. He says of Israel : (Ezek. xxxvi. 36.) “ I the Lord build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate : I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it. I will cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded.” “ Thus saith the Lord God ; I

will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." It shall be done. But their prayer shall precede. I will be inquired of for this: that which usually calls down a blessing from heaven shall not be superseded by my decree. And so when the Lord has engaged for his people: "They shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand:" let it be ever remembered that "his promise concerning our stability does not make it a matter indifferent for us, to use or not to use the means whereby we may remain steadfast. This assurance must not exclude our labour. To our own safety, our own sedulity is required."¹

On the same principle as that which retained the sailors on board the vessel, Paul also urges the whole company to strengthen themselves with food. Their labour, and distress, and despondency, had caused them for fourteen days to neglect any regular sustenance. Exertion would be required, and they were in no state for exertion. He exhorts them to a wiser course, and sets them an example of confidence and resolution.

33. *And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.*

34. *Wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.*

¹ See Hooker on Hab. i. 4.

35. *And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all : and when he had broken it, he began to eat.*

36. *Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.*

37. *And we were in all in the ship two hundred three-score and sixteen souls.*

38. *And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.*

39. *And when it was day, they knew not the land : but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.*

40. *And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder-bands, and hoised up the main-sail to the wind, and made toward shore.*

41. *And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground : and the fore part stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.*

42. *And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.*

43. *But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose ; and commanded that they which could swim, should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land :*

44. *And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*

Before, we saw the selfish character of the seamen. Now, the soldiers appear to no better advantage. Lest in the confusion any of the prisoners should escape, and so they be called to account, *their counsel was to kill the prisoners.*

What a contrast to the conduct of Paul! He was earnestly anxious for the safety of these very persons: he had interceded with God for those, who were themselves ready either to leave him to perish or to put him to death. When the angel led him to know that *God had given him the lives of all that sailed with him*, doubtless it was an answer to prayer; it was acquainting him that God had listened to his intercession, and granted what he desired. He could not be concerned with these persons, not even as a prisoner whom they had in charge, without feeling an interest in their safety. This is the characteristic of the man who is renewed by grace, in whom the Spirit of God dwells. All his fellow-creatures become the objects of his interest or care. Because he understands the value of the soul; and feels the importance of every hour which may afford fresh means or opportunity for its salvation. Because, too, he knows the awfulness of death; the terrors of that judgment, when “as many as have sinned without law, shall perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law:”² and all shall be rewarded according to their deeds.

The character of Paul had not been so lost upon the centurion, that he could suffer him thus to perish through the cruelty of the soldiers whom he commanded. *Willing to save Paul, he kept them from their purpose.* In the end, the faithfulness of God’s promise was manifest. That took place which could only have happened through his pro-

² Rom. ii. 12, &c.

vidential care. From a shipwreck of this nature, on a rocky shore, the waves running violently, two hundred and threescore and sixteen persons, *some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, escaped all safe to land.*

May we not use it as an example of the way in which a far greater promise shall be made good, and all the people of God, “of all nations, and kindred, and tongues,”³ shall be brought together on the heavenly shore? Some “out of great tribulation;” some after extraordinary trials; some, perhaps, having well nigh “made shipwreck of their faith;” but given to the earnest prayers of their parents, or their ministers, and restored by divine grace.

Whatever may have been the allotted course, whatever the means of escape from the storms of this present world and the malice of Satan, all will unite in ascribing it to the same mercy: all will join in the same song of praise and thanksgiving “to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

³ Rev. vii. 2.

LECTURE XCII.

PAUL AND HIS SHIPWRECKED COMPANIONS ARE
HOSPITABLY RECEIVED AT MELITA.—A. D. 62.

ACTS xxviii. 1—10.

1. *And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.*

2. *And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.*

The conduct of this *barbarous people*, (so the Greeks and Romans called all who did not speak their language,²) might put many a civilized land to shame. Instead of endeavouring to prey upon the shipwrecked crew, and to profit by their misfortune, they *showed them no little kindness*. There was amongst them a sense of hospitality and feeling of compassion, which had survived the ruin of our nature, and which was never better exerted or more amply rewarded. We are reminded, in the sequel, of Paul's own rule. "Be not forgetful to

¹ Now so well known under the name of Malta. Such, at least, appears the most probable supposition.

² These were originally a colony of Phœnicians.

entertain strangers ; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”³

For a while they knew not whom they were entertaining. Paul was engaged, like the rest, in making provision for the general comfort ; till an incident occurred which showed him to be no ordinary prisoner.

3. *And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.*

4. *And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.*

Such was the notion spontaneously rising in their minds. *No doubt this man is a murderer.* Such misfortunes would not follow him ;—first, a storm, and a wreck, and a hair-breadth escape from the sea ; and now a viper’s fang ;—this would not be, unless he was one whom divine vengeance follows, and *suffereth not to live.* There was a like impression among the mariners in the case of Jonah. As he was under sail for Tarshish, “there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.”⁴ The sailors believed, like the islanders at Melita, that vengeance was pursuing some one on board. “And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is come upon us.”

³ Heb. xiii. 2.

⁴ Jonah i. 4—7.

This must be regarded as a part of that “law written in the heart,”⁵ by which those are judged to whom the revealed law of God has never been made known. It was not all truth; and it was not all error. They were right in believing that God notices and avenges crime. They were wrong in supposing that present calamities are to be taken as proofs of his anger. There will be a time for “the revelation of the righteous judgment of God,” when he “will render to every man according to his deeds.”⁶ But that time is not yet: and meanwhile “we walk by faith, and not by sight.”

Here, however, was in one sense an exception. God did in this case interpose; not, indeed, for vengeance, but for Paul’s safety.

5. *And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.*

6. *Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.*

What happened to the apostle at Lystra, was here reversed. There the populace first worshipped Paul and Barnabas, and were afterwards excited to stone them. Here the course was different. First they regarded him as a murderer; and then *changed their minds, and said that he was a god.* Certainly God was with him; and here fulfilled the prophecy concerning “the signs which should follow them that believe.” “They shall take up ser-

⁵ Rom. ii. 15.

⁶ Rom. ii. 6.

pents. They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”⁷

7. *In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius : who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.*

8. *And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux ; to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.*

9. *So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed :*

10. *Who also honoured us with many honours ; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.*

We are not distinctly told how Paul took advantage of the influence which he obtained amongst the inhabitants of Melita. We are not told that he led the people, whose diseases he healed, to the God in whose power he healed them. But we cannot doubt the fact. He could not be a few days in Athens without feeling “his spirit stirred within him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.” Surely he would not stay three months amongst these simple and friendly islanders, without endeavouring to instruct their ignorance, and “turn them from their vanities to serve the living God.” They supplied his temporal wants ; he would not be insensible to their far worse spiritual destitution. From the diseases under which they suffered, he would lead them to the origin of all suffering, and show them how “by sin came death,”

⁷ Mark xvi. 18.

and all the various kinds of misery under which “the whole creation groans.” And then he would conduct them on to him who offers the only remedy; who “himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.”⁸ The voyager, who has refreshed himself in some remote island, leaves behind him at his departure useful seeds, or useful animals, which afterwards spring up and multiply, producing benefits which the nation had never known. Not such benefits, however, as Paul would leave at Melita, while he dropped the precious seed of the word of God, which might “take root downward and bear fruit upward,” to the praise of him who had directed the wind and storm, and carried his apostle to the *island which was called Melita*.

LECTURE XCIII.

ACTS xxviii. 11—16.

PAUL'S ARRIVAL AT ROME.—A. D. 63.

11. *And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.*¹

⁸ Matt. viii. 17.

¹ Two pagan demi-gods, supposed to influence the weather. The image painted or carved on the head of the vessel, was its *sign*.

12. *And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.*

13. *And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:*

14. *Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.*

15. *And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii-forum, and the Three Taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.*

Paul had now those wishes gratified which he had long indulged. To know, that in the imperial city, the seat of so much wealth and glory, and of so much idolatry and wickedness, God had yet a people, and Christ a company of believers;—this had been no slight cause of joy. He had already written, “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” Now, he did not only hear of them and think of them from a distance, but he was able to see them, and to “take sweet counsel together” with them. For this he had earnestly longed and prayed. (Rom. i. 10.) “Making request if by any means now at length, I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established. That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”

It was no part of his prayer, that he should visit Rome as a prisoner. In this respect God chose for

him. And if it was as God willed, Paul would not have it otherwise. He had but one object, “that he might finish his course with joy.” This is often brought about in a way contrary to our expectations. We pray for growth in grace ; we pray for spiritual advancement. Affliction comes. Comes, perhaps, in answer to such prayer, as the mode in which it is granted, the channel through which the blessing is conveyed.

The brethren were impatient to see the apostle, whose letter addressed to them, and revealing so much of “the counsel of God,” they had been used to study, and of whose more abundant labours they had heard for many years. The tidings of his arrival in Italy travelled rapidly to Rome during the seven days which he spent at Puteoli. And when the party reached *Appii-forum*, they found brethren who had come forward fifty miles to meet them, and others again at the place known by the name of the *three Taverns*, which was thirty miles distant from the city. The signs of so much zeal and eagerness cheered Paul, as well they might : *he thanked God, and took courage.*

And we too may be encouraged, when we reflect on the scene and on all that it brings to mind. From those gates through which the brethren passed, that they might meet Paul, and accompany him to the city, many a crowd had often issued to welcome some victorious commander, and conduct him in triumph to the capitol. But here was a party formed and here were hearts disposed to welcome one who came on a very different errand,

and with a very different claim to honours. It had not been his office "to destroy men's lives, but to save them." "The weapons of his warfare were not carnal," but divine; not made successful by human strength or prowess, but "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds" of ignorance and sin. He had not warred against his own flesh and blood, against men of his own nature and sprung from the same parentage: he had warred against the great enemy of mankind, against "the rulers of darkness," against "spiritual wickedness." He had not been sent out in his career by men of like passions with himself, under the influence of anger or revenge, under the excitement of covetousness or ambition: he had received his commission from heaven, and had turned his course as God himself directed him. And now he was not entering Rome as a triumphant conqueror,—his chariot preceded by ensigns of power and greatness, followed by a train of captive princes, and greeted by the acclamations of the multitude. He entered the city as a prisoner, under the custody of soldiers, and only attended by the members of a "sect everywhere spoken against." His triumph belongs to a future season: when "this world and the lust thereof" shall pass away, and much that has been held honourable among men will be covered with "everlasting contempt." Then they will bear the crown, who here have borne the cross, and "the good and faithful servant shall enter into the joy of his Lord."

16. *And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with a soldier that kept him.*

When Paul wrote to others, “My God shall supply all your need,” he spoke according to his own experience. The counsel of God determined that he should be thus brought to Rome. But still he must be provided for. We may conclude that the centurion who had favoured him throughout the voyage, recommended him in such terms to the captain of the guard that he was treated with special indulgence, not mixed amongst others as a prisoner, but suffered to dwell by himself, *with a soldier that kept him.*²

And now there was an opportunity for the Roman Christians to show their fidelity towards their heavenly Lord.

We must suppose that some risk must be run, and some worldly interests sacrificed by those who did countenance the apostle in his present condition. But doubtless there were many, who, like Onesiphorus at a later period, “sought him out very diligently, and found him :” were “not ashamed of the Lord, or of Paul his prisoner.” Many, who now remembered how Christ had said, “He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he who receiveth

² To whom, as the Roman custom was, he was attached by a chain. Paul alludes to this, Col. iv. 19; Phil. i. 7, 13, 16; 2 Tim. ii. 9; Phil. 10—13.

³ 1 Tim. iv. 16.

me, receiveth him who sent me. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in nowise lose his reward.”⁴

LECTURE XCIV.

PAUL REASONS WITH THE JEWS AT ROME.—

A. D. 63.

ACTS xxviii. 17—29.

17. *And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together : and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.*

18. *Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.*

19. *But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar ; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.*

20. *For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you : because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.*

⁴ Matt. x. 40.

The epistle to the Romans shows that in the Christian church at Rome many Jews and many Gentiles were united. There, as elsewhere, were “many Jews who believed;” still only “a remnant, according to the election of grace:”¹ not the greater number; the mass and body of that people. For these Paul was earnestly and painfully anxious. As he had written some years before, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”²

Thus he had felt at a distance. And now that he was on the spot, his sentiments were the same. Taking, therefore, no more than three days to refresh himself from his journey, he made himself known to the chief of the Jews resident in Rome, and called them together. He had no time to lose. He had “an errand from God.” Who could say how soon he might be summoned before the emperor; and who could say what might be the event of that trial?

When they were come together, he explains the circumstances under which he had been brought to Rome. In his usual conciliating spirit, he disclaims the thought of having *ought to accuse his nation of*. And he asserts, as he had before asserted, that the only charge against him was his maintaining, that the promise which God made

¹ Rom. xi. 5.

² Rom. x. 1, 2, and ix. 1.

unto the fathers, he had now fulfilled ; had realised the hope on which Israel through all its history had been depending. He had said before Agrippa, “ Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers.” So now he repeats, *For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.*

When the prophets spoke of the righteous branch which should be raised up ;³ of the “ desire of all nations” who should come ;⁴ of the King who should reign in righteousness ;⁵—they expressed *the hope of Israel*. When Simeon, and Anna, and other devout persons, were “ waiting for the consolation,” and “ looking for redemption :”⁶ they entertained *the hope of Israel*. When the Samaritan woman answered the Lord, saying, “ I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ ;”⁷ she alluded to *the hope of Israel*. When the two disciples on their way to Emmaus lamented their disappointment, for “ they trusted that Jesus had been he who should have redeemed Israel :”⁸ they shew what had been *the hope of Israel*. Paul’s commission was, to declare that this hope had been fulfilled ;—fulfilled in the person of Jesus. For this offence he had been accused by his countrymen ; for this offence he was *constrained to appeal unto Cæsar* ; and for this offence he had been brought as prisoner to Rome.

³ Jer. xxiii. 5.⁴ Hag. ii. 7.⁵ Is. xxxii. 1.⁶ Luke ii. 25, 38.⁷ John iv. 25.⁸ Luke xxiv. 21.

21. *And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee.*

22. *But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest : for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.*

23. *And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging ; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.*

24. *And some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.*

Thus Paul set before his countrymen at Rome, as he had done elsewhere, the true meaning of the law and the prophets. *He expounded to them the kingdom of God.* Here was their great error. They would not understand the nature of that kingdom. He showed them the true redemption ; not from poverty, but from iniquity ; not from the power of earthly rulers, but of Satan ; not from their worldly sorrows, but from worldly affections. *He persuaded them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets.* Showing, doubtless, that he was the true “ Paschal Lamb ;”⁹ the sacrifice typified in all the sin-offerings of the law ; the victim on which the offender laid his hands, and confessed that if God were to deal with him according to his deserts it might justly be with him as with the sacrifice that was slain.¹ Showing, too, that Jesus was indeed the King who should “ rule his people Israel,” though not from an earthly throne ;

⁹ 1 Cor. v. 7.

¹ Lev. iii. throughout.

the King under whom they might have peace, for great is the peace of his subjects ; the King under whom righteousness should flourish, and “ violence be no more heard ;” the King who had prepared for them “ an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled,” such as nothing on earth could afford, and nothing on earth could enjoy.

According as the heart was freed or not freed from the love of earthly things, and prepared or not prepared with humility from above, *some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.* Even the apostle’s reasoning, however earnest, however long-continued, *from morning till evening*, could not convince all hearts. Something besides argument is needful. As on the one side there must be force used, that any impression may be conveyed ; so on the other side there must be a subject capable of receiving the impression. And all hearts were not thus softened. *Some believed.* The rest “ were blinded,”² and *believed not.* Paul could not let them separate without reminding them of the prophet’s awful words, now about to be fulfilled.

25. *And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word. Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,*

26. *Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye*

² Rom. xi. 7.

³ Is. vi. 9. Applied by Paul to the same purpose. (Rom. xi. 8,) as it had been four times in the gospels.

shall hear, and shall not understand ; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive :

27. *For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed ; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

28. *Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*

29. *And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.*

It had been written, also, in Hosea: “ I will call them my people, which were not my people, and him beloved, which was not beloved.”⁵ All had been foreseen and foreshown. The gospel should be preached to the Jews. But they, as a nation, should prove dull of hearing, and their eyes should they close. They, “ being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, would not submit themselves to the righteousness of God.”⁶ Again, the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles. *And they would hear it.* So that “ the Gentiles would attain to righteousness which is of faith :”⁷ the righteousness “ which is unto all and upon all them that believe.” “ And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called the children of the living God.”⁸

⁵ Hes. ii. 23. See Rom. ix. 25.

⁶ Rom. x. 3.

⁷ Rom. ix. 30.

⁸ Hos. i. 10.

Beware of pride of heart. Pride of heart cast off the Jews. They “sought not righteousness by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”⁹ They would not submit to that method of salvation which God had prepared and revealed. And in all ages, pride of heart is one great obstacle to receiving the gospel. In some way or other, men “go about to establish their own righteousness:”¹ not to become righteous, for which object they cannot be too zealous; but to prove themselves righteous, and deserving of acceptance with God.

Those are blessed, who are brought to a better mind: to whose ears the tidings of eternal life, as the gift of God through Jesus Christ, are glad tidings: and whose hearts are enabled to understand how he is “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” In life and in death, these are blessed. “For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”²

⁹ Hos. ix. 26.

¹ Ib. ix. 32

² Ib. x. 4. 11.

LECTURE XCV.

PAUL REMAINS TWO YEARS AT ROME. HIS SUPPORT, AND HIS SUCCESS THERE.—A. D. 63.

Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

30. *And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,*

31. *Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*

Thus did Paul “bear witness” at Rome. We perceive now the purpose of all those many circumstances which had conspired to place him there. It had been wonderfully ordered that he should have the opportunity, during *two whole years*, of *preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*, in the great city of the world: and that without hindrance. The very imprisonment in which he was held favoured him. Had he been able to enter into the Jewish synagogues, or to dispute, as at Athens, in the public places with them that met with him, the magistrates would have interfered, and the law would have put him down. But being confined to his own hired house “with the soldier who kept him,” *he received all who came to him, no*

man forbidding him : and though he was bound, “ the word of God was not bound.” Many, we may suppose, of his visitors were his own countrymen, whose lingering prejudices he would endeavour, and often successfully, to remove. But more, probably, were Gentiles : providentially led, through acquaintance or connexion, to seek that light which God had set up, ready to enlighten every man.

During this sojourn at Rome, Paul did not forget the churches which he had planted elsewhere. His epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, written at this time, show his anxiety concerning them. They also enable us to gather some particulars of his residence which history has not elsewhere recorded.

We learn, for instance, something of the support and comfort which he received while dwelling in the midst of this idolatrous and luxurious city.

He was not left alone. There were collected round him a faithful band ready to live or die with him. “ Marcus, Demas, Lucas, his fellow-labourers, and Jesus, which is called Justus : who are of the circumcision.” These were his “ fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, who were a comfort to him.”¹ So was Aristarchus, the companion of his voyage, whom, with Epaphras, he styles his “ fellow-prisoner ;” and Tychicus, who conveyed his letter to the churches.² Afterwards

¹ Col. iv. 7, &c.

² Col. iv. 10 ; Philem. 23 ; Col. iv. 7 ; Eph. vi. 21.

Timotheus came to him, "his own son in the faith:" and Epaphroditus, "a brother and companion in labour and fellow-soldier," who brought from Macedonia a token of affection from the Philippian brethren.⁴ In this manner "his God supplied all his need:" he "had all, and abounded," through the kindness and gratitude of those to whom he had ministered blessings which no price could repay.

But though he wanted not comfort from without, his chief comfort was within. All was safe and peaceful there. He had made up his mind to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus:"⁵ to seek as his sole dependence "the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ." And in this confidence he could rest secure. "To live was Christ, to die was gain."⁶ "Not as though he had already attained, either were already perfect:" he knew that as long as he continued in the flesh, he must be still "reaching forth unto those things that are before, pressing on towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."⁷ Still this was no labour or sorrow to him: it left him in full enjoyment of the assurance which belonged to his faith. "He knew in whom he had believed: and that he was able to keep what he had committed to him unto the great day."⁸

⁴ Philip. ii. 19; iv. 18.

⁵ Ib. iii. 8.

⁶ Ib. i. 21.

⁷ Ib. iii. 12-14.

⁸ 2 Tim. i. 12.

A further comfort was derived him through the success which was granted to that cause on which his heart was fixed. "Many of the brethren waxing confident by his bonds," gaining courage from his example, "became much more bold to speak the word without fear."¹ So that the truths of the gospel pervaded both the highest and the lowest stations. They reached the fugitive Onesimus, who had been slave to Philemon at Colosse, and had fled from his service to Rome. He, being converted to the faith, returned again to Philemon, "not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved."² Then the same truth which stooped to the fugitive slave, climbed also to the imperial palace. So God ordered it. The apostle comforts the Philippians under the thoughts of the duration in which he was held, by giving them to "understand that the things which had happened to him had fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel: so that his bonds in Christ were manifest in all the palace, and in all other places."³ The cause for which he suffered had become known, the Saviour whom he proclaimed had been received: and when he sends his salutation to the distant brethren from those at Rome, he especially mentions "the saints of Cæsar's household."⁴

"So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed," during *the two whole years when Paul*

¹ Philip. i. 14.

² Philem. 16.

³ Philip. i. 12, 13.

⁴ Ib. iv. 22.

dwelt in his own hired house, and received all that came unto him, preaching the kingdom of God.

All along he had entertained a confidence that he should be preserved through the present danger to further service. "I trust in the Lord," he had written to the Philippians, "that I myself also shall come shortly." And again to Philemon: "I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you."⁵ So it proved; no one seems to have appeared against him: and after five years confinement he found himself once more at liberty: able to enjoy what he had so earnestly longed for, the sight of his beloved churches once more.

At length he returned to Rome,⁶ "always abounding in the work of the Lord." And now the time arrived, when he should cease from his labours, and his works should follow him. He was called to give account before the Emperor Nero of the new and strange doctrine which he was teaching: and so evident was the danger, that no one dared to "stand with him. All men forsook him." Only He remained, "who is closer than a brother."⁷ "The Lord stood by him, and strengthened him."

⁵ Acts ii. 24; Phil. 24.

⁶ After an interval of uncertain duration, of which "we know scarcely anything." See Burton, Lect. ix. The fact of the book of Acts closing its history with these two years, seems conclusive proof that Luke composed, or rather finished it, at this period of time.—Id. p. 275.

⁷ Prov. xviii. 24.

For the moment, “ he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”⁸ But as he foresaw, whilst writing the account to Timothy, the delay was not for long: the season was near when he must seal with his blood the testimony which he had so long given. For this he was fully prepared. Many years before he had said, “ I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord Jesus.” Longer experience had not made him less ready to do or to suffer for the Master whom he served. We possess his parting words: “ I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”⁹

Thus, like the prophet before him,¹ who, taken himself from his earthly trials, cast down his mantle to encourage his successor: so has Paul, in his last recorded sentiments, left for others the comfort wherewith he himself was comforted of God. A crown of glory was prepared for him. But not for him only, the apostle in labours most abundant, in grace above measure: but for all them also that “ love the Lord’s appearing:” for all the faithful brethren in every age and country, whose

⁸ 2 Tim. iv. 16.

⁹ Ib. iv. 6—8.

¹ See 2 Kings ii. 12, 13.

hearts have been directed by the Spirit “to the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ.”²

² 2 Thess. iii. 5.

THE END.

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